

ORBIT - Online Repository of Birkbeck Institutional Theses

Enabling Open Access to Birkbeck's Research Degree output

Moments of Russianness : locating national identification in discourse

<https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/40126/>

Version: Full Version

Citation: Brock, Maria (2015) Moments of Russianness : locating national identification in discourse. [Thesis] (Unpublished)

© 2020 The Author(s)

All material available through ORBIT is protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law.

Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

**Moments of Russianness:
Locating National Identification in Discourse**

Maria Brock

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD Psychosocial Studies

**Birkbeck College
University of London**

Declaration

I, Maria Brock, hereby declare that this thesis is my own work.

Abstract

This thesis investigates national identification by applying psychosocial methodology to discourses produced in Russia during the era of 'Putinism' (2000-). Existing literature on post-Soviet Russia frequently claims that at the heart of the nation lies an absence of symbolic functions or subjective formations with which Russians could identify. At the same time, there has been relatively little empirical work that seeks to examine national identification using a psychosocial approach. The study fills this lacuna by looking for moments of identification across different texts, such as interviews, surveys and media representations. Using as its starting point the conditions of possibility of post-2000 Russia, the study pays attention to societal shifts and disjunctures, examining how they are reflected in discursive patterns and formations.

The dissertation's empirical element consists of two parts. Through the analysis of interviews and open-ended surveys, the first part documents respondents' ambivalent relationship with Russia and Russianness, which is characterized by splitting and disavowal. In the second part, the study deploys a case study approach. The first case study focuses on discourses of rejection and (dis)identification as featured in the Russian public's responses to Pussy Riot. It concludes that in their policing of Russianness and the demarcation of features deemed undesirable as embodied by the group, participants in the debate have found ways of both shifting the threat Pussy Riot represents, and also of once again 'enjoying the nation'. The second case study examines discourses that seek to elicit identification in the populace via representational mechanisms around the figure of Vladimir Putin. It is argued that the various strategies employed to activate leader love, ranging from hypermasculinity to hyperrealism, seem to indicate a void at the heart of the Russian president's persona and, by extension, his national project, making them profoundly unstable.

Overall, the thesis provides a rare empirical contribution to the psychosocial study of national identification. It addresses the interrelation between imaginary and symbolic identification and the pivotal role of fantasmatic processes therein. The identifications I locate in the thesis are precarious and fleeting, speaking of the loss of a fantasy of national greatness, and of an internalization of images and scenes borrowed from literature and history. The study also offers a consideration of the implications of such attachments for Russian society, thus providing further illustration of the interdependence of the psychic and the social.

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
LIST OF APPENDICES	8
CHAPTER I: CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES OF RUSSIANNES	9
<i>(Auto)Orientalism</i>	<i>11</i>
POST-SOVIET IDENTIFICATIONS	13
<i>Discursive referents</i>	<i>14</i>
HOW TO READ RUSSIA.....	16
<i>Interpellated by the nation.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Eternal returns.....</i>	<i>19</i>
DISCOURSES OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA	21
<i>Parallel Russias.....</i>	<i>23</i>
CYNICAL DISCOURSES	24
<i>Putin as symbol.....</i>	<i>27</i>
CONCLUSION AND THESIS OVERVIEW	30
<i>Thesis structure</i>	<i>31</i>
CHAPTER II: IDENTIFICATION.....	34
IDENTIFICATION IN PSYCHOANALYSIS.....	34
<i>Ideal ego & ego ideal</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Identification in Lacan</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Identification, Introjection, Incorporation</i>	<i>42</i>
IDENTIFICATION AND THE SOCIAL	43
<i>Symbolic order</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Broader discursive formations.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>National Identification.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Love and identification.....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Pathological identifications.....</i>	<i>53</i>
CONCLUSION.....	59
CHAPTER III: READING FORMATIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION: A PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH	61
METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY AND INJUNCTIONS.....	63
<i>Discourse analyses.....</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Discourse and the subject.....</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Psychosocial methodologies: deadlocks and impasses.....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Lacanian discourse analysis.....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Return to Freud.....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Methodological lessons.....</i>	<i>72</i>
MULTI-METHOD RESEARCH.....	73
<i>Part I: Interviews and surveys.....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Surveys.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Respondent selection: discourse-rich yet opinion-poor?</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Part II: Case studies of public discourses.....</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Ethics.....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Reflexivity and resistance.....</i>	<i>82</i>
CONCLUSION.....	84
CHAPTER IV: NATASHA'S DANCE AND THE DRUNKARD IN THE RAIN: A PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH TO TEXTS ON RUSSIANNES	86
AIMS OF THE CHAPTER	88
DISIDENTIFICATION	89
DISAVOWAL	91

MYTHOLOGISATION	95
PRELAPSARIAN STATES	99
NOSTALGIC FANTASIES	104
SPLITTING THE NATION	106
CONCLUSION	108
CHAPTER V: THE DRUNKARD IN THE RAIN: A PSYCHOSOCIAL ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS ON RUSSIANNES	111
A TALE OF TWO RUSSIAS.....	111
CHAPTER STRUCTURE AND AIMS	113
CONDITIONS OF RUSSIANNES	115
DELEGATION	117
IMAGES OF NATURE.....	122
MYTHICAL SCENES	127
CONCLUSION.....	132
CHAPTER VI: ‘VELVET REVOLUTION’ OR ‘FRENZIED UTERI’ – MAKING SENSE OF PUSSY RIOT	134
<i>The events and their aftermath.....</i>	<i>134</i>
MAKING SENSE	135
<i>Context.....</i>	<i>136</i>
<i>Theoretical framework</i>	<i>138</i>
CHURCH AND PRESIDENT	141
REACTIONS	145
<i>Reactions in the West.....</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>Responses to the response.....</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Spectrum of affect.....</i>	<i>148</i>
<i>From mental illness to demon possession</i>	<i>149</i>
WHAT’S IN A NAME?	149
RETURN OF THE REPRESSED	153
MAN ON A MISSION.....	155
WHO GETS TO SPEAK FOR RUSSIA?	159
CONCLUSION.....	162
CHAPTER VII: FANTASTIC MR PRESIDENT: THE MASKS, MYTHS AND MIRRORS OF PUTINISM	165
MASKS, MYTHS AND MIRRORS.....	166
<i>Searching for the real President.....</i>	<i>168</i>
<i>The Putin Years.....</i>	<i>169</i>
THE PRESIDENT AS SPECTACLE.....	172
<i>The President as Master Signifier.....</i>	<i>173</i>
BETWEEN HYPERMASCULINITY AND HYPERREALISM.....	176
SPIRIT OF BRICOLAGE.....	180
“A COMPOSITE OF KING-KONG AND THE SUBURBAN BARBER”	183
<i>The President as Father and Brother.....</i>	<i>185</i>
FROM COLLECTIVE PUTIN TO CONCRETE PUTIN	188
<i>The President on the Couch.....</i>	<i>188</i>
CONCLUSION.....	190
CHAPTER VIII: MOMENTS OF RUSSIANNES - CONCLUSION.	192
THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS.....	193
<i>Split subjectivities.....</i>	<i>193</i>
<i>Myths of Russianness.....</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>Pussy Riot as a symptom of Putinism.....</i>	<i>197</i>
<i>Temporality.....</i>	<i>198</i>
REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH DESIGN	201

FURTHER DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH	202
<i>Masculinity and femininity</i>	202
<i>Cinematic imagination and fantasy</i>	204
REFERENCES	208
ONLINE & NEWSPAPER RESOURCES.....	222
APPENDIX A	231
APPENDIX B	232
APPENDIX C.....	233
APPENDIX D	243
APPENDIX E.....	244
APPENDIX F	246
APPENDIX G	247
APPENDIX H	250
APPENDIX I.....	251
APPENDIX J.....	252

Acknowledgements

I wish to express gratitude to my supervisors, Professors Derek Hook and Lynne Segal. Derek Hook helped me shape the initial proposal at the LSE, having first supervised my MSc thesis, while Lynne Segal joined the supervision at Birkbeck. Both have, in their individual ways, steered me through this process wonderfully, engaging with my work and conveying confidence. I feel lucky to have worked with two such inspiring scholars.

Additionally, I would like to thank my two examiners, Prof Irina Sandomirskaja and Dr Claudia Lapping, for their engagement with my work and productive feedback, which will no doubt shape the future trajectory of this thesis.

I also wish to thank the interview and survey participants in Russia and elsewhere, without whom this thesis would not have been possible.

The research was funded by postgraduate scholarships at the LSE as well as Birkbeck College's School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. Between 2011 and 2014 I was recipient of a doctoral studentship by the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Academic Foundation). I am also grateful for a series of travel grants I received over the last 4 years which enabled me to present and discuss my work at several international conferences and workshops.

There are a number of people who, through their friendship and advice, have made the journey towards this thesis a much more enjoyable one. Discussions and collaboration with Ross Truscott have proven an inspiration over the years. My friend Ceren Yalcin has been an important PhD companion and interlocutor on matters more and less academic. LSE friends and colleagues Maria Kyriakidou, Jessica Templeton and Rui Lopes gave critical feedback and injected a sense of fun in London, Athens, Lisbon, and hopefully many more places in the future. Claudine Provencher helped me with formatting, and her kindness.

Finally, I want to thank Mischa for everything.

List of appendices

Appendix A: Email recruiting interviewees

Appendix B: Interview topic guide

Appendix C: Transcript of sample interview (Masha)

Appendix D: Table of interviewees' sociodemographics

Appendix E: Email recruiting surveys respondents

Appendix F: Survey questions

Appendix G: Pictures utilised in survey

Appendix H: Table of survey respondents' sociodemographics

Appendix I: Consent form for interviews

Appendix J: Disclaimer for surveys

Chapter I: Contemporary discourses of Russianness

Despite a recurrent romantic fascination with the region, which has recently once more been coupled with more alarmist overtones, the existence of a Facebook forum called *'Why We Study Eastern Europe'* hosted by a group of scholars of the region suggests that there is a patent necessity to justify this preoccupation. Indeed, it appears that too much scrutiny would trouble the dominant vision of Eastern Europe, and Russia in particular, which can be encountered in articles and photo essays such as 'The Wacky World of Eastern Europe in the Early 2000s'¹ and '42 GIFs that Prove Russia is the Most Bizarre Place on Earth'². The choice of such epithets as "bizarre" and "wacky" betrays a form of post-Cold War Orientalism, a discourse in which the post-socialist world, when not downright gloomy and threatening, becomes at best either darkly mysterious, or inviting of ridicule. Even scholars of the area are not immune to this. The resurgence of nationalist and patriotic sentiment, together with the unfettered materialism (Patico, 2005) displayed in certain circles, added to what appears to be an almost caricatured image of Russia. In many aspects, the level of distortion Russia's image has undergone in Western public perception is reminiscent of its designation as an 'evil empire' at the height of the Cold War period. There is clear puzzlement regarding the nature of post-soviet society, as it is still frequently referred to more than 20 years after the Soviet Union factually ceased to exist.

While, in its parodic form such as in the 2006 film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, the clichéd perception of the region can be turned against those most invested in its proliferation (Condee, 2008)³, in most incarnations these formulaic images are circulated for a reason. Speaking of the current fascination with the architectural legacy of socialism that has resulted in a 'culture of ruin-gazing', Jamie Rann comments:

[...] Russia and eastern Europe serves as an imaginary space in which western nations can play out their own crises of identity, without having to confront them directly. In this case, the legacy of militarised imperialism and its decline can be explored at a safe distance by pinning a hammer and a

¹http://www.slate.com/blogs/ behold/2014/03/30/martin_kollar_nothing_special_examines_the_often_bizarre_world_of_eastern.html

² <http://www.rsvlts.com/2013/10/18/meanwhile-in-russia-all-gif-edition/#1>

³ See also: <http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2006/11/12/Next-Page-Learnings-of-Borat-for-make-benefit-cultural-studies/stories/200611120163>

sickle to its cracked marble carcase⁴.

This treatment of the post-Socialist world as profoundly alien thus points not merely to a lack of scope for ambivalence or the inability to provide a more nuanced engagement with the region, but rather to an instrumental use of this discourse.

Other examples even closer to the geographical and thematic focus of the study include the continued tendency by some Western commentators to view Russia's relationship to its leaders, and to Putin in particular, in Freudian terms. Here Russia emerges as a deeply authoritarian country, differing profoundly from democratic traditions of the West, and therefore requires a different set of analytical tools in order to make sense of it. In this reading, the country's population is forever in search of a father figure, and the protest movement of 2012 can be understood as a youthful population's rebellion against its overly strict father⁵. The resolution to this cyclical problem, however, is merely a replacement of one leader figure by another, potentially more radical one. Other popular references for observers of contemporary Russia are the great 19th century works of literature, especially Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol and Turgenev, which are utilised as sources of knowledge about the Russian national character⁶. This practice is then usually justified in one of two ways. One is to pinpoint some of the more 'hysterical' moments in contemporary Russian cultural and political life, and then to reference similar scenes in these authors' works, with the notoriously feverish Dostoevsky a perennial favourite here⁷. The second move involves tracing lines of historical and *psychological* continuity between Tsarist Russia and the nation in the 21st century⁸. This orientalist contingent is by now often factored in by Russian commentators, thus creating a purely hypothetical conversation encompassing multiple straw men, first and foremost among them Western pundits ignorant of Russia.⁹

⁴ <http://calvertjournal.com/features/show/2950/russian-ruins-photography#.U9qWmRa0Zg2>

⁵ <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/01/08/russia-father-problem/tl6p5zMMq7OxLdqFptAnUN/story.html>

⁶ http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/27/how_gogol_explains_the_post_soviet_world_and_chekhov_and_dostoyevsky?page=full

⁷ <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-02-02-khapaeva-en.html>

⁸ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/08/05/putin-man-who-would-be-tsar>

⁹ http://slon.ru/world/novyy_rezhim-994537.xhtml

(Auto)Orientalism

The characterisation of this discourse as orientalist is no exaggeration: in their coherence, pervasiveness and connection to geopolitical relations of power - themselves a direct product of the Cold War - some of the West's images of Russia are strongly reminiscent of Edward Said's seminal study of Orientalism (1978):

These ideas explained the behavior of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. (Said, 1978/95: 50)

And while Said's comments precede the Internet, which has led to a greater polyphony of voices becoming accessible from anywhere in the world, this does not mean that hegemonic representations are a thing of the past. One of the thesis' overarching aims is to investigate and analyse some of these hegemonic representations, such as prevailing orientalist narratives of Russia, first and foremost by presenting a sustained engagement with how Russians *themselves* speak of, and relate to Russia, thereby gaining greater insight into the inner workings of discourses of Russianness.

However, while one should remain sceptical of work producing or reiterating discourses seeking the embellishment of a certain image of Russia, it would be hypocritical not to concede that at the same time the present study contributes to this body of work, and that, regardless of its intentions, the researcher speaks from, and is invested in a position:

A second contradiction of Russian cultural studies concerns the Western researcher's subject position, a fact that can neither be changed nor expiated but simply exists as an evident strain in any analysis. Potential carriers of the very discursive practices to which we might claim resistance – americanization, homogenization, globalization – we must concede in advance that our research does not exist uncontaminated by its point of origin (Condee, 2006: 202).

Additionally, and as indicated above, these representations of Russia, coupled with the country's traditional orientation towards an - in turn imaginary - West, have led to their internalisation, which is once more reminiscent of Said's work:

But like any set of durable ideas, Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those called Occidental, European, or Western; in short, Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine. (Said,

This sustained element of what I here refer to as ‘auto-orientalism’ is often expressed through, or combined with a desire to reinforce Russia’s cultural ties with Europe. According to Alexander Etkind’s controversial book on *Internal Colonization* (2011), Russia has always been particularly susceptible to being influenced and transformed by cultural representations, making it uniquely self-reflexive: “Culture was also a screen on which the endangered society [of imperial Russia, MB] saw itself – a unique organ of self-awareness, critical feedback, warning and mourning.” (Etkind, 2011:3). Etkind relates this to the process of ‘internal colonization’, thereby referring to the expansion and exploration of Russian territory until the 20th century – with possible comparisons to the ‘conquest’ of the American West, but also to a colonization of one’s *own*, that is, ethnically identical people. Thus, instead of racial categories to justify and perpetuate a system of domination, internally Russia relied on the legal category ‘estate’, allowing certain individual ownership of serfs¹⁰ as a form of ‘civil slavery’ (Etkind, 2011: 105). Perhaps more relevant for the present study is the project of Westernisation (or ‘*overcompensation*’ according to Etkind, 2011: 105) which was conducted with the greatest impetus under Tsar Peter the First or ‘the Great’ (1672- 1725). In its liminal location between Europe and Asia, Russia has always been engaged in a process of cultural self-definition, and with the enforced Westernisation under Peter the Great, this discourse of auto-orientalism, that is, of a denigration or repression of the perceived ‘asiatic’ influence on Russian culture, began taking a hold which is palpable until today. Indeed, this ‘split’ subjectivity – of wanting to elevate those features that make up one’s identity, together with a contradictory desire to denigrate all that is Russian, is one of the characteristic features of the discourse of Russianness.

This facet shall remain relevant throughout this thesis, which aims to track patterns and prevalent formations of Russian subjectivities and identifications in the era of Putinism¹¹ across several instantiations of discourse. The individuals and groups referred to here have collectively experienced the collapse of an ideological edifice, followed by an economic ‘shock therapy’ in the 1990s and an exposure to all the vagaries of the economic global cycle, either in the guise of neoliberalism, or first that of ‘modernity at an accelerated pace’ (Habermas, 1990, cited in Ray, 1997). In fact, while formally

¹⁰ See for example Nikolai Gogol’s 1842 satirical ‘epic poem in prose’ *Dead Souls*.

¹¹ A term frequently applied to the years since Vladimir Putin came to power (2000-), as well as to the political system he is seen to have created.

restricting its scope to that of the last 14 years of Putinism, such an undertaking cannot be achieved without consideration of the 1990s and even the 1980s, as these are constantly being referenced by the generation that forms the focus of this study. The periods of *perestroika* and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by the ‘chaotic’ or even ‘traumatic’ nineties, and subsequent period of greater economic stability coupled with an increasingly authoritarian state, appear to have a distinct feel, and each of them is sometimes recruited to explain specific facets of Russianness in the 21st century. It is important to remember, however, that their categorization into distinct periods is a feature of historiography and other scholarly endeavours, rather than a reflection of their segregation in discursive terms.

The current chapter introduces prevalent explanations of how social, political and cultural developments since the 1980s are seen to have shaped contemporary Russian subjectivities in ways that are relevant to the overall concerns of the thesis. It therefore inquires how each of these might contribute to, or hinder the formations of conditions of possibility that would enable national identification to take place.

Post-Soviet identifications

*Russian society does not exist. It is a sort of atomised substance,
Whose elements live lives that are completely disconnected from each other.
(Sergey Sokolov, interview with BBC Russia, 11.11.2010¹²)*

While the end of the Soviet Union led to an increase in studies on the nature of totalitarian regimes, social scientists appeared to be more reluctant to apply their theoretical knowledge to analyses of contemporary Russian society. Existing discussions are united by a preoccupation with the effect the changes in the Eastern bloc have had on national and cultural identities. As Arel and Ruble (Arel & Ruble, 2006) have noted, it is through the revival of the ‘cultural perspective’ in the social sciences that the salience of *identity* has been brought to the fore. When a monolithic structure such as the Soviet Union disintegrates, social, cultural, political and individual facets of identity are naturally affected. What was once one country became fifteen separate political entities, each with a distinct language, cultural heritage and claim to political sovereignty. If one adds to this the fact that Russia alone is home to over 170 ethnic groups, then it is perhaps not

¹² http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2010/11/101110_novaya_sokolov_interview.shtml

surprising that investigations into the nature and struggle over these post-soviet identities have occupied scholars to such an extent. Some scholars have attempted to split the notion of a post-soviet identity into sub-components such as *attributes*, *categories* and *dimensions* (Arel & Ruble, 2006), however, this serves as an organisational principle rather than an in-depth analysis of where and how to locate and define an identity in the first place. Conceptions of national identity as they have been applied to the former Eastern bloc countries are chiefly concerned with its usage as a form of self-definition, as a strategy of asserting one's identity not too dissimilar from the 'narcissism of minor differences' commented upon by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Freud, 1930).

The present study argues that, while discussing issues such as minority rights and the causes of border struggles are certainly substantial in gaining a better understanding of contemporary Eurasia, they rarely seem to question the utility of the notion of identity *per se*, and whether it adequately serves to describe the "unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture" (Hall, 1988). This lacuna in much of the literature looks like something of a missed opportunity when we consider that it is exactly in times of societal transformation that identity categories are paradoxically both destabilised and re-established. In a more discursive vein, it can be said that through such experiences of dislocation "the contingency of discursive structures is made visible" (Howarth, et al., 2000), as new referents are needed to make sense of one's place in the social world. In terms of the project's aim to investigate discourses of identification from two angles, this entails looking at how existing societal and historical discourses unfold on a subjective level, that is, which signifiers assume a privileged position in the formation of new subject positions. With Russia still usually placed in the category of 'country in transition', incapable of arriving at a more clearly defined national and political position, the question remains whether the absence of a political project or a set of clearly defined post-soviet subject positions is problematic for Russians themselves.

Discursive referents

Scholars such as Urban (1994) see the discourse of post-communism in Russia as one that is trying to define itself in terms of national identity. Marlène Laruelle, assuming a historical perspective on the phenomenon of nationalism in Russia, remarks that by the late 2000s, what could be observed is a "a Russian public space increasingly marked by

nationalism”(Laruelle, 2009: 22). In opposition to some scholars, who have remarked on what they perceive to be an increasing ‘fascization’ and ‘Nazification’ of post-soviet Russia, she analyses patriotic rhetoric in contemporary Russia with a view to its underlying aims, such as encouraging payment of taxes, and an increasing consumption of Russian-made products. She concludes that patriotic rhetoric is by now an essential part of politicians’ discourse: “No public figure [...] is able to acquire political legitimacy without mentioning his or her policy choices in terms of the nation’s supreme interests”(Laruelle, 2009: 1).

Another referent of meaning used by the regime as part of “broader political agenda of achieving unity” (Admiraal, 2009) is religion, and Russian Orthodoxy in particular. Why it should be that religion that has been successfully utilised as a signifier in the discourse of new Russia is explained by Galina Eremicheva in the following terms:

The growth of religiosity at the beginning of perestroika was, in our opinion, a direct consequence of the shock of the social reforms, accompanied by collapse of the state social safety net and the spread of anxiety among various groups of the population. In conditions of structural breakdowns, many familiar reference points for organizing people’s lives were no longer operative. A feeling of instability, doubt in the successfulness of chosen strategies, and even the lack of resources to implement them caused people to turn to religion (Eremicheva, 2010: 55).

While this may go some way in explaining what motivated so many Russians to turn to “new reference points” as a way of overcoming the sense of disorientation following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the statement is also representative of traditional, causal accounts of social phenomena. A focus on the necessity of stabilising discourse through the use of certain ‘master signifiers’ is in line with discourse theory. However, this explanation fails to take into account the effects necessary in interpellating the subject and activating subject positions. The tendency of political scientists to engage in overly rationalist explanations is also evident in their investigations of racism in Russia, with the minor modification of the addition of some (unqualified) psychoanalytic terminology. Shnirelman locates its origin in the country’s economic and political problems: due to Russia’s “deformed economic structure” (Shnirelman, 2009: 140), natural resources are viewed as national property not to be shared with foreigners; and the restricted democracy and lack of an outlet of dissatisfaction with the government means that anger is ‘displaced’ onto immigrants.

A more nuanced discussion is provided in Anastasia Leonova's (2009) account of xenophobia in Russia. According to numerous surveys, it is mostly the "culturally advanced and highly educated" (Leonova, 2009: 159) Russians who display xenophobic tendencies. Leonova questions the claim that this could be the by-product of "uncertainty and confusion about Russia's future". Instead, she sees its roots in a "crisis of group-identification", "a continuing re-emergence and reproduction of archaic principles and ideas" (ibid.), of nationalist markers ranging from nostalgia for the Tsar to a re-appraisal of Stalinism, rather than a production of ideas less rooted in the past.

How to read Russia

With the end of the Soviet Union, there was a mass perception of the loss of some kind of Soviet communality and of a unified Soviet cultural text, a Soviet master narrative that had produced a distinct kind of conformism as well as a distinct form of dissidence (Boym, 1995: 150)

These 'archaic principles and ideas' which appear to make up the *ur-text* of Russian culture have provided those who, following the cultural turn in the social sciences and humanities, study prevalent social and historical phenomena through the lens of culture, with a deceptively rich repository of explanatory means:

As far as methodology goes, the concept of culture can thus be said to function in the recent literature as a junction box that conceals the tangled wires of causality and interdependence. Cultural paradigms provide templates that survive the passage of time (Engelstein, 2001: 392).

Through such a form of cultural analysis, all artefacts of Russian cultural production can provide clues to understanding Russia, as they are all seen to form part of the larger text of Russianness. These artefacts range from mass phenomena to ideological constructions, from the socialist realist novel to architectural forms to objects kept in the home (e.g. Borenstein, 2007; Boym, 1994, 1995, 2005; Etkind, 2011; Figs, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Sandomirskaja, 1999, as well as Katherine Hodgson's upcoming book on poetry and post-soviet identity). Some of the interpretations may strike one as fanciful, with culture here acting to return to "another form of predestination" (Engelstein, 2001: 393). However, these scholars at their strongest have provided those interested in applying the lessons of discourse analysis to the post-socialist world with credible alternatives to political science and area studies approaches. Nevertheless, it is important to be wary of any scholarly output that gets carried away by romantic,

personalised visions of history inspired by the tragic fate of so many of the country's most outstanding figures, or that provides too smooth and linear an explanation of the relationship between recurrent cultural forms, and wider societal discourses.

Indeed, those scholars recruiting individuals' voices alongside cultural artefacts to give an account of the effects of discourse on subjectivity may find that there is a *lack* of current signifiers alongside the circulation of older forms. Serguei Oushakine, in an article published in 2000, characterises the post-1990s landscape in terms of a state of perpetual transition, one that fails to mobilise mechanisms of identification:

The post-Soviet threshold, the post-Soviet transitionality and in-betweenness thus has a peculiar nature—it does not provide any cues about the direction to follow, it does not channel one's identificatory process; instead it outlines the paths that should not be taken.(Oushakine, 2000:995)

To him, Russia represents an “arrested discursive field”, in which the “socio-cultural transformation of the discursive field is reflected in [...] individual discursive practices”(Oushakine, 2000):

The symbolic structure of post-Soviet society apparently fails to produce clearly defined positions and functions with which the post-Soviet subject could identify. Moreover, being in its embryonic state, this symbolic structure cannot provide post-Soviet society with the necessary mediating link, thus provoking a situation of social dispersion and/or narcissistic withdrawal. In the absence of this mediating, intersubjective space, I argue, the very situation of transition might become institutionalised (Oushakine, 2000: 1011).

According to work published nearly 10 years later, only minimal change occurred in the meantime. Sergei Prozorov goes so far as to say that contemporary Russia represents simply a “disavowal of the 1990s”, marked by an absence of any “positive ideological construction”(Prozorov, 2009: 59).

A failure to master the social world is thus reflected in a failure to produce new discursive signifiers. Putin's Russia is portrayed as being stuck in a passage between a Soviet and a Post-Soviet Russia, in which the lack of new symbolic forms as well as the ability of past signifiers to draw individuals back into the past has led to a form of “narcissistic withdrawal” away from the public sphere. Oushakine, in a logic that echoes the present project's concerns with how changes in the symbolic order affect subjectivities, gives the following two reasons:

One is the gradual disappearance of what could be called a meta-symbolic framework that initially enveloped the discourse of perestroika, while the other has to do with the absence of the field of post-Soviet cultural production (Oushakine, 2000:1007).

Oleg Kharkhordin, himself inspired by Foucault, argues that this withdrawal may in fact be the result of a process of de-politicisation, which commenced in the late Soviet period and is now taken advantage of by current politicians. This means that any attempts by current rulers to dominate public discourse must be analysed in terms of an “ideology of action” – as an attempt to remobilise a society whose experience is detached from the state (Kharkhordin, 1999).

Interpellated by the nation

Besides identifying primary national signifiers and their relative presence or absence in the national imaginary, this thesis is interested in the function of such Master signifiers in processes of national identification. This entails not only a study of the current discursive field as evidenced in private and public discourses, that is, a re-examination of the observations made by Oushakine at the beginning of the Putin period, but also an investigation of how certain discourses are internalised or rejected. In other words: how is the subject hailed by discourses of the nation, and why?

In her 2001 work on the discourse of ‘homeland’ (родина), Irina Sandomirskaja examines how discursive practices of its employment do not merely represent metaphors that dominate speech, but in fact manage to ‘suture the entire spectrum of social and economic relations’ (2001/3). The Motherland, in its quality as an ideal ‘empty’ signifier, cannot be defined or located, but can be accessed through narrative. Through its essential openness and crucial affective component **родина** has colonised objects that are not truly connected to it, so that its discourse speaks of family and community, of one’s place of origin as well as potentially the nation as a whole and any ideological values pertaining to it. In the context of Russia, this has ensured that all of its citizen can potentially be ‘hailed’ in the name of the Motherland. The Russian subject here is thus not an agent shaping the discourse of ‘home’ on an individual level, but instead becomes its effect or ‘secondary function’.

According to Sandomirskaja, following the demise of the Soviet Union this signifier is not itself disappearing, but is in fact experiencing something of a revival. It has adapted to embrace a type of discourse that is 'less repressive and more seductive'. In order to achieve this, it assumed a compensatory function in response to the nostalgia and sense of declassification coupled with, or provoked by the drive towards consumption and commodification that characterise the post-Soviet period. The all-encompassing discourse of **родина** has thus benefitted from the lack of new cultural and ideological signifiers observed by Oushakine and Prozorov.

Eternal returns

Scholars of contemporary Russia have remarked on the return of Soviet signifiers, which is not only related to a paucity of newer cultural forms, but also to a nostalgia for an actual and imagined past¹³. To a certain degree, this celebration or fetishisation of elements of a remembered and imagined history is fundamental to processes of identification:

The imagined community of the nation is based as much on shared forgetting as on shared history. The bond of affection and collective identification with the nation is established not only through common ways of life but also through cultural myths that constitute the phantasmatic space of the national imagination. (Boym, 1995: 134)

Julie Cassiday and Emily Johnson go so far as to posit that nostalgia, together with consumption, make up the defining cultural practices of post-Soviet Russia as they offer Russians "the opportunity to articulate new modes of subjectivity that although they seem to pay homage to a vanished past, also reflect contemporary social, political and communicative reality" (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 40). The two processes are in fact intertwined: the artefacts required by the practicing nostalgic can be subjected to commercialization, a process which can frequently serve to liberate the object from the ambivalences of history – for example "offering an image of 'easy Russia', a history minus its political and ideological complexity" (Sandomirskaja, 1999: 117). Ilya Matveev (2014) similarly insists that the identity of the new Russian middle class is founded not on political influence or significant wealth, but rather on the limited but defining ability to consume. Fittingly, Stavrakakis (2007: 199) highlights that in order to maintain a form of national solidarity, the community traditions and celebrations that are needed can also

¹³ Indeed, the two phenomena are mutually dependent.

include 'consumption rituals'.

However, in a different light, this eternal reappearance of past signifiers in lieu of the creation of new symbols and meanings has been read as a 'return of the repressed' that is, as symptomatic of a past that has not been worked through. Contemporary Russia is here understood as being plagued by the shadow of the 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as, further back in the past, the traumas of WWII and Stalinism that have not been faced. If one chooses to read large nations' history in terms of cataclysms, and their populations' collective experiences as having trauma as its foundation, then the Soviet Union in particular provides ample material for discussion¹⁴:

A traumatic experience is one the subject repeats because he or she cannot work it through. Today, more than one nation carries something on its back it cannot see: Germany (Nazism), Russia (Stalin), France (Vichy), the United States (Vietnam). England still can neither face nor forget the Empire and loss of Empire. (Easthope, 1999: 32)

Some commenters insist that this incomplete exorcism of past traumas, which is observed in discourse, is mirrored in material manifestations. Famous dissident Vladimir Bukovsky states that the regression to authoritarianism under Putin could have been averted had the past been dealt with thoroughly, archives opened and those guilty of perpetrating crimes on behalf of the state punished at the beginning of the 1990s.¹⁵ Those with clearer linguistic and discursive affinities, such as Gasan Gusejnov (2012) insist first and foremost that the violence inherent in Stalinist language has shaped Soviet and post-Soviet discourses fundamentally. This violence was partially repressed, and in the meantime continued an existence in Russian discourse due to its formulaic nature and catchiness. However, this inhumanity erupts at crucial moments in both private and public discourse. According to Irina Sandomirskaja, this includes the traditionally self-reflexive and 'discourse rich' intelligentsia:

It would appear that the totalitarian experience from which we have been trying to alienate ourselves is now being re-interiorized, re-introduced into the personal experience of the intelligentsia as the sole foundation from which self-identification should proceed (Sandomirskaja, 1995: 57).

¹⁴ It is worthwhile pointing out that there are also scholars opposed to such a wholesale application of the notion of trauma. Lauren Berlant, for example, argues against using (the discourse of) 'trauma' as the prescribed response to crisis (Berlant, 2011:9).

¹⁵ Comment made V. Bukovsky as part of a discussion following screening of documentary 'They Chose Freedom' on 03.06.2014 in Pushkin House, London.

Discourses of the intelligentsia

Very particular forces came together to produce this sense of responsibility, what Berlin calls the “collective sense of guilt,” that the intelligentsia has carried with it for a century and a half (Gessen, 1997: 6).

The Russian intelligentsia is of greater symbolic significance to the nation's self-representation and self-understanding than comparable classes in other countries, chiefly because of the voice it has given the country nationally and internationally for almost two centuries, such as in the guise of the Soviet dissidents. The voices that emerge, and which are certainly more polyphonic than can be documented here, document the class' precarious, ambivalent position on the symbolic interstices between East and West, often supplemented by a transnational consciousness as well as a continued, fraught attachment to the country's political and social fate.

Since its emergence in the first half of the 19th century, this class has been strongly concerned with issues of social justice and 'enlightenment', while at the same time often being divorced from the reality of the majority of the Russian people. Its members were seen to have gained an understanding of peasants' (and later workers') plight mainly on theoretical grounds, thus frequently romanticizing their intuitive goodness. Throughout Russian and Soviet history, the essence of Russianness, of the 'Russian soul' in its capacity for spirituality and suffering, was seen to be located with the Russian peasant, and to this day authentic Russianness is believed to be found in the countryside¹⁶. At the same time, members of the intelligentsia frequently remained barred from a more intuitive entry to this 'life world', which often saw as its result a considerable degree of mutual misunderstanding. This separation was to some extent retained throughout the Soviet Union, despite ostensive efforts to provide access to higher education to parts of the population that had previously been excluded from it. The paradoxical state of conceptualizing a future for a country of which one only knows a small part was retained after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sandomirskaja describes this condition in the following words in 1995:

¹⁶ <http://rusrep.ru/article/2012/02/29/russians/>

The intelligentsia are the unique class of text producers whose only purpose seems to lie in generating discourse for their own consumption (as they generally constitute the reading public they address in their own writing or artistic production), a discourse, moreover, which is mostly about themselves (Sandomirskaja, 1995: 55).

Texts produced by members of the intelligentsia – while ostensibly engaging with problems faced by the majority of Russians, are written for an audience of other members of that same class, thus never attaining much resonance beyond the confines of this enclosed, ‘non-public’ sphere. This is especially relevant if one recalls that one of the characteristic features of this very class is its faith in the power of the Word, which was in evidence for example in the 1960s as its members organized public readings of Silver Age poetry to symbolise defiance of the regime.

The sense of existing in something akin to a discursive vacuum, even if experienced at varying level of discomfort, is accompanied by a disorientation in the post-soviet period. This follows decades of varying degrees of repression, but also of an unrivalled sense of purpose. In *Dead Again*, Masha Gessen surveys the subject positions available to members of the intelligentsia in the Russia of the 1990s during that particularly confusing period. While journalistic and somewhat anecdotal, the trajectories she encounters in the book end up mirroring some of the positions already alluded to in this chapter, such as nationalism and xenophobia in the form of anti-Semitism. They also include a drive towards mysticism or religiosity in direct response to the collapse or previous compromising of an ideological edifice. In Gessen’s reading, this is because: “Faith, like ideology, deals in symbols. In Russia and the Soviet Union, where a national inferiority complex found its reflection endlessly magnified, there were, for the most part, grand symbols”(Gessen, 1997:49). A newfound religiosity is thus seen as a substitution of one kind of certainty for another, here echoing Eremicheva’s earlier comments. Some attempted to implement their convictions, honed over decades in which they had been barred from political participation, through an active engagement in politics. However, for most, this experience was short-lived:

The problem, as it turned out, was that the intelligentsia perceived enlightenment as changing through process and the state’s relationship to its citizens; the state, on the other hand, simply sought information that would aid it in perpetuating itself (Gessen, 1997: 125).

As will be illustrated in the next section, this idea of certainty – even if it merely applied to certainty in *who* one’s enemies were – needs to be troubled somewhat. What the brief

involvement in politics demonstrated above all were the fundamental differences not merely in visions of a potential future for Russia, but in the means used to conceptualise this future.

Parallel Russias

Russian society is frequently portrayed as split, with the split located along cultural, and, relatedly, discursive lines:

The fact that the intelligentsia and managers of state-run companies both speak Russian is just an unhappy coincidence. They represent different countries and cultures. They require translators, but neither of them has the time nor the desire to listen to the translation, even if were they provided with one.¹⁷

In order to speak of Russia, the Russian subject can make use of a number of discursive registers. Following the quote's representation, these discourses do not interact, instead running parallel. When forced into a confrontation, this merely serves to enhance the sense of mutual misunderstanding and tension. Indeed, according to economic geographer Natalia Zubarevich there are potentially as many as '4 Russias'¹⁸. Both perspectives suggest that the divide between the different Russias is insurmountable.

According to Ilya Matveev, one of the manifestations of this divide is that members of the intelligentsia, writers and journalists especially, tend to utilise the tools of cultural analysis to discuss politics and society: "They comment on politics through the language of culture, thus culturalizing politics" (Matveev, 2014: 191). In fact, culture as a repository of subject positions and language has been so influential to this class that its members have found themselves unable to locate their position on the sociopolitical map of Russia. Like their Western counterparts, this educated group of Russians feels an affinity with the middle class, but unlike them, it has not on the whole experienced this class' degree of financial stability and political influence:

The state without the state – the neoliberal Putin regime – pushed this new type of stateless people toward identification with the middle class, but

¹⁷ <http://www.snob.ru/selected/entry/52681>

¹⁸ http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1467059/chetyre_rossii

In her article, she presents them as 1) 'the Russia of large cities', 2) 'the Russia of medium-sized industrial cities', 3) 'the periphery', and 4) the republics of the Northern Caucasus and Southern Siberia.

today many are realizing that they never will reach this imaginary level of social success and capitalist “happiness.” The Noah’s Ark of the discontented is still searching for political direction and articulation (Chehonadskih, 2014: 207).

While a sense of political disorientation may be familiar across the global political landscape, and may to an extent be a consequence of neoliberalism and the increasing individualisation of modernity (e.g. Layton, 2014; Beck & Beck Gernsheim, 2001 ; Rose, 1999), in Russia such a sense of feeling adrift has to be viewed in the context of a depoliticisation that has its true origin in the late Soviet period (Kharkhordin, 1999), and on which the current regime relies in order to sustain itself.

An absence of formal language to denominate one’s position is linked to a disturbance in the discursive field, and hence to subjects’ inability to take up a subject position from which to speak as members of the body politic. As evidenced in the texts, one strategy for the Russian subject is a recurrent search for these positions in the field of cultural production – a field which in itself experienced a type of interruption (Oushakine, 2000), and which, though strongly fantasmatic in content and thus perhaps of additional appeal as potential vehicle of expression, is not suited to an elaboration into a set of coherent set of political demands. The other approach is a complete removal of oneself – whether physical and/or discursively – from all that has come to represent contemporary Russianness, while retaining some allegiance to a more universal, and strongly romanticised essence of the nation. The discourse of a cultured elite versus a more loutish, uncouth majority with too little in common between them, which has assumed an almost neocolonialist character according to some (Matveev, 2014: 188), is further enabling of such an undertaking:

The Russian and Soviet intelligentsia have always been a highly class-conscious stratum. Being an *intelligent* — one of the intelligentsia — was, and still is, viewed as a moral obligation and a privilege, a special position of chosenness with respect to the non-writing, "non-thinking" majority (Sandomirskaja, 1995: 56).

Cynical discourses

One type of discourse apparently available to all groups of Russian society is that of cynicism. It encompasses those in government and business as much as those far from the centres of power and wealth. Journalist Peter Pomerantsev claims that the Kremlin’s ultimate ideology is that of a cynical form of postmodernism incarnate in a political

project: “a world of masks and poses, colourful but empty, with little at its core but power for power’s sake and the accumulation of vast wealth.”¹⁹ Eminent sociologist Lev Gudkov observes that Russians in general have become increasingly cynical with the hardships of a lengthy transition and its failed promises²⁰. Rather than resulting in a desire to exit this condition, he sees this cynicism as being symptomatic of a stagnant society, which is nowhere near imminent change. Thus, while “cynicism indicates the erosion of traditional value systems, the destruction of former beliefs and norms, the beginnings of deep socio-cultural changes in society” (Gudkov, 2013), it cannot be regarded as heralding institutional or societal change. It may be indicative of states of conflict between different “value systems”, but not necessarily of their resolution. Instead it makes subjects more suspicious of any vision of change: “In this sense, post-Soviet society shares the notorious “postmodernist” relativism of the 1980s and tends to understand any political language as purely ideological” (Chehonadskih, 2014: 201).

Russia appears to be steeped in multiple layers of cynicism: post-transition, post-modern, and late-Soviet, placing multiple obstacles in the path towards a more active participation in the public sphere with the aim of instigating political change. In his work on the *Cynical Reason of Late Socialism* (1997) and later book *Everything Was Forever* (2005), Alexey Yurchak describes how for the last generation to have been born in the Soviet Union, socialism itself had become immutable. It was perceived as a kind of monolith against whose background a degree of freedom of expression could be achieved. The result was a type of non-participation in official communist events – beyond one’s physical presence - and the staging of a kind of ‘parallel event’ accompanying it. Socialist ideology had achieved a kind of ‘hegemony of representation’, through its omnipresence - the almost complete absence of discourses that would contest the official narrative. However, he insists that just because this seemingly endless stream of representations of the same political messages was put up with by most citizens, one should not necessarily interpret this as a sign of any actual belief in their content:

[...] the official reality was uncontested not because its representation was taken for granted as truthful, or because people were afraid to contest, it, but, first and foremost, because it was apparent that no other public representation of reality within the official sphere could occur (Yurchak,

¹⁹ <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n20/peter-pomerantsev/putins-rasputin>

²⁰ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/lev-gudkov/russian-cynicism-symptom-of-stagnant-society>

This uniquely coherent official sphere of representation tolerated no true resistance, but, equally and paradoxically, it also tolerated no true recognition, or active involvement. Thus both political activists and dissidents were regarded with suspicion, as they insisted on engaging seriously with an ideology which was surely so meaningless, yet so foundational to reality that this would equate questioning its very nature. The solution was in effect a kind of ‘pretense misrecognition’ – a going-through-the-motions, while simultaneously, and in private, constantly exposing the regime to ridicule through jokes, or *anekdoty*, whose production and private dissemination grew exponentially in the 1970s and 1980s. This is ‘cynical ideology’ in the extreme (Žižek, 1991) – not only does the engagement in ideological practices largely replace the belief in them; it effectively makes it redundant. By the early 1980s, the political organization of the Soviet Union had come to be seen by most of its citizens as both eternal and essentially empty.

There are, however, two potential conclusions to be drawn from this. One is that, according to Yurchak, the abyss between public and private discourse created a great amount of psychic tension. In a Freudian vein, he credits the joke work people engaged in so rampantly as having been able to release or resolve some of this tension, while at the same time “helping to sustain pretense misrecognition of the incongruous and to maintain concurrent official and parallel spheres” (1997:183). Secondly, while the Soviet Union officially continued its existence until 1992, it seems to have done so mainly based on institutional inertia. In this line of explanation, it appears that there is only so much disidentification an ideological edifice can sustain, as it will gradually hollow it out from the core:

Geopolitical analysts are as a rule blind to what Hegel calls the ‘silent weaving of the spirit’, for the underground disintegration of the spiritual substance of a community which precedes and prepares the way for its spectacular public collapse. In a way, we can say that the crucial thing takes place, that the mole does his work, before ‘anything happens’ (Žižek, 1993: 285)

However, the relationship between identification and cynicism may not simply be one of straightforward antithesis, whereby the existence of one signifies the absence of another. The two phenomena could in fact exist on different planes. On one plane, a cynical attitude is avowed, and identification thereby disavowed. Yet on another this confirmation of

having subscribed to the official societal discourse of Putinism does not have to signify that hidden beneath the surface there is no attachment to a coveted vision of Russianness. In a more Lacanian vein, which relies on the notion of 'enjoyment' or *jouissance* as necessary in sustaining any bond, there may be such enjoyment in cynicism:

It is by means of this 'enjoyment' that ideology can take its failure into account in advance, that deliberate ignorance or cynicism (pre-or post-ideology) is not outside of ideology but is the very form it takes today (Butler, 2005: 53).

As referred to earlier, cynicism is also regarded as characteristic of Russian politicians' relationship with politics and the populace. In fact, the only political figure frequently exempt from this is Vladimir Putin, both in the extent of his assumed commitment to Russia, and the response this is believed to attract in the population, where his approval ratings have consistently topped those of any Western leader²¹.

Putin as symbol

In 2014, almost a decade and a half into Vladimir Putin's run as president, prime minister, and once more president, his presence, too, has assumed somewhat monolithic qualities. The Russian president has arguably dominated the public's perception of contemporary Russia within and outside its borders, lending name and direction to the last 14 years of Putinism (Sakwa, 2007; Prozorov, 2009; Applebaum, 2012; Gessen, 2012; Hill & Gaddy, 2013; Goscilo et al, 2013 to name just a few). The political imaginary of post-1990s Russia is both characterised and constrained by his larger-than-life persona, as he has come to stand both for growing economic stability, and decreasing political freedom. Thus, for example, during his first two terms as president and later as prime minister, Russia's GDP per capita increased from US\$7.7k in 2000 to US\$15.9k in 2010²², while in 2014 *Freedom House* awarded the country's freedom of press a score of 81 out of 100 (100 being the highest possible degree unfreedom)²³, thereby equalling levels in Sudan and Ethiopia. The political party *United Russia* (Единая Россия) is closely associated with Putin, having supported him and Dmitry Medvedev in presidential elections since 2004. It has by now become the dominant force in the Russian parliament, setting a conservative course for the government, and closely associating itself with the Russian Orthodox Church.

²¹ http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency_performance_trends.php

²² Source: CIA World Factbook. <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=rs&v=67>

²³ <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/russia#.VDPJQVZIUak>

For many the current face of Russia has therefore come to be associated with Putin as its leader. However, discussions of the Russian president frequently contain a barely concealed suspicion and open disagreement as to the ‘real’ nature of the President’s agenda. His many masks, ranging from sterile technocrat to hyper-masculine, autocratic ruler, inspire a recurrent quest to identify the authentic political project behind them, with verdicts varying from the extremely liberal to the extremely authoritarian. In some readings, the 1990s are treated as an aberration, a traumatic episode between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new Russia, and its long shadow as well as the absence of any credible alternative have ensured that a Russia without an authoritarian head of state has become unimaginable. While it is uncertain how much Putin’s attachment to certain recurrent themes and tenets is truly ideological in nature, it is clear that the President is conscious of the power of historical and cultural symbols, and that he is not afraid to recruit them when it suits his policies. Here the president and his advisors were able to utilise in their favour the "semiotic chaos of post-Soviet society" (Baer, 2013: 170) by borrowing elements from all periods of Russia and Soviet history.

However, more recently the political tides appeared to have turned against *Time* magazine’s 2007 Person of the Year²⁴, Vladimir Putin, and in favour of *Time* magazine’s 2011 Person of the Year—the Protester²⁵. Accompanying the 2011 parliamentary elections and reports of electoral fraud, as well as the subsequent announcement that Putin would be running for president for a third time²⁶, a series of protests and mass demonstrations demanding fair elections took place in Moscow and other large Russian cities throughout 2012 before more or less dying down by 2013. Instigators of the protests were the same representatives of the educated, urban middle- class mentioned earlier. In their latest incarnation as the ‘creative class’, the group of protesters was nevertheless unable to garner the sympathies of the majority of Russians. In the polemical words of Eduard Limonov, writer and then-leader of the National Bolshevik Party:

²⁴

http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1690757_169615_0,00.html

²⁵ http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132,00.html

²⁶ Following his 4-year ‘hiatus’ as Russia prime minister.

“Progressivism”, the desire to be contemporary, free from the past and its traditions by all means [...] has played a mean joke with our intelligentsia. It separates itself further and further from the people by not wishing to recognise its entitlement to tradition and to spirituality. [...] As for foreigners – well, what can you expect? It is rare for one of them to understand Russia. Actually, our ‘progressive intelligentsia’ has also long ago stopped understanding Russia. They buried their noses in their laptops....²⁷

The urban intelligentsia is thus once more accused of false allegiance and criticised for a discourse that differs too greatly from that of ordinary Russians. While the official grounds for critique may be in part aesthetic – Limonov goes on to condemn the creative class for their penchant of being in awe of all that is Western, or even Western-sounding (“Internet, iPad, Pussy Riot, Occupy Abai”, *ibid.*), the reason why many people in Russia cannot identify with the Moscow protests is also sociopolitical. The capital’s middle class is demanding political changes that match its conception of the world, which is a vision that is not shared by everybody. Indeed, rather than giving in to the protesters’ demand or offer an acknowledgement thereof, the government’s immediate response was to introduce a series of repressive acts, “from raising the fines for participation in “unsanctioned” demonstrations and imposing harsh limits on NGOs, to the darkly absurd laws against “offending the rights of believers” and “homosexual propaganda” (Budraitskis, 2014: 184), as well as laws re-criminalising slander and the ‘defamation of religious feelings’²⁸, to name just a few. Even more recently, the call to search for a Russian ‘national idea’, which had been instigated by Yeltsin in 1996 and shelved no too long after (Smith, 2002), was reactivated under Putin²⁹. It appears that after a decade of dubious stability³⁰, fixing parameters of Russianness is now once more a task of national importance.

²⁷ <http://limonov-eduard.livejournal.com/246726.html>

²⁸ This law was anticipated by the trial against members of Pussy Riot, the responses to which are analysed in detail in Chapter VI.

²⁹ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2263724>

³⁰ Maria Chehonadskih, for example, is not willing to take this characterisation at face value: “Instead, “stability” is oriented toward reproducing the “chaos” that it was summoned to eradicate. The result is a managed instability, which on the social level appears in diverse forms of precariousness, informal relations, corruption, and violence. Although this managed instability is recognized to some extent, it is branded as “normalized” and opposed to the mythical chaos of the 1990s, which is represented as more extreme than any current chaos. Even skeptics are convinced that Putin is the “lesser evil.”” (Chehonadskih, 2014: 203).

Conclusion and thesis overview

The introduction's somewhat circular structure mirrors the temporal recurrence of many of the signifiers and discursive tendencies referred to throughout the chapter. The referents available after the collapse of the Soviet Union have, in some readings (Oushakine, Prozorov), not been significantly enriched or modified in the following decades. Explanations for this 'arrested discursive field', in which old signifiers are merely reshuffled, range from the trauma and chaos of the 1990s, which left in its wake a kind of 'aphasia' (Oushakine, 2000) or discursive paralysis, to the depoliticisation which began in the Soviet period (Khakhordin) and which was coupled with a prioritisation of economic development, in turn enabled by steadily increasing oil prices. At times it was suggested that only a leader figure can 'suture' the free-floating, disconnected signifiers of contemporary Russia, which include references to an imperialist Tsarist past, religious imagery, consumption, and a harking back to the Soviet Union, especially the Brezhnev period. Due to its essential openness, the catch-all term and discourse of 'motherland' (родина) is one that is similarly able to hail the subject in the name of the nation (Sandomirskaja) and has been operationalised for propaganda purposes throughout Soviet and Russian history.

The thesis examines the impact of these discursive conditions of (im)possibility on processes of identification. It argues that by studying national identification, rather than nationalism or national identity, one can gain insight not merely into how and where national signifiers are reproduced, but into which signifiers are privileged and to what degree they are assumed by subjects – especially if one keeps in mind the abovementioned 'crisis of group-identification' (Leonova, 1999) ascertained by some scholars. The current chapter's observations point to these discourses having to retrieve much of their content from the past, as contemporary narratives of Russia so often feature varying degrees of denigration, which in itself has historical roots (e.g. Etkind). The following chapters will investigate which of these signifiers are internalised, and which are rejected. Similarly, if there are many instances of dismissal or rejection, these, too, may point the way to elements in discourse which must not be questioned, or which are perceived as inalterably authentic or pure.

The fact that there may be both an avowed cynical stance together with, or alongside an identification with affect-laden signifiers such as that of the motherland initially points to a series of contradictions. Indeed, a similar assessment is possible of Vladimir Putin's

personification of both a multitude of facets of ‘Russianness’, and simultaneously of an essential emptiness. However, this thesis shows that these paradoxes are symptomatic not just of psychic life, but of the life of a nation as well. In fact, they need not be seen as contradictions at all if one concedes that psychic reality operates according to a different logic, which in turn has an impact discourse. Much of the subsequent chapters will therefore be preoccupied with the methodological and theoretical implications of latent forms of identification across different forms of text, as well as moments in which the cynicism that prohibits open avowal of these attachments appears to be temporarily deactivated or transcended. The thesis investigates the ways in which an attachment to the nation can be performed or enacted in discourse, thus gaining a fuller insight into the “phantasmatic space of the national imagination” (Boym, 1995) of contemporary Russia.

Thesis structure

Following the present (introductory) chapter, **chapter 2** provides insight into the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis by giving an overview of conceptualisations of identification in different school of psychoanalysis, with a special focus on ways in which these notions can be applied to identifications with the group or nation, and to the aims of this study in particular. **Chapter 3** (‘Reading formations of national identification: a psychosocial approach’) examines strategies of making the analytical move from discourse to psyche, which is also one of the central methodological preoccupations of psychosocial studies. The chapter presents a summary not only of the methodological procedure of the present study, but also a survey of relevant of strategies to examine human subjectivity. It hereby follows a dual structure: after an exposition of the thesis’ empirical process, including reflections on the respondent selection and rationale for the case studies, the second part describes how to distinguish a psychosocial approach from other forms of textual analysis, and which methodological steps this entails.

Chapter 4 (‘Natasha’s Dance: a psychosocial approach to texts on Russianness’), together with the subsequent chapter, forms the first of two parts of the thesis’ empirical element. In line with the thesis’ aim to detect instances of identification with Russianness and to account for passionate attachments to the nation in discourse, the chapter analyses eight interviews, simultaneously outlining the challenges of establishing authenticity of (moments of) identification in textual material. Discursive operations

discussed include a disavowal of knowledge in favour of a celebration of affect, the mythologisation of aspects of Russian national character and history, and a splitting of the nation into good and bad Russias. Interviewees repeatedly emphasise the impossibility of identifying with contemporary instantiations of Russianness, but this is coupled with a distinct desire to *love* the nation, which finds its expression either in a sense of disappointment, or a list of grievances against a Russia which has failed to make itself loveable. Aspects of Russianness that are capable of inspiring affective investment can be found in the realm of aesthetics and culture, so that elements from literary and cinematic culture are identified with *fantasmatically*, being first deemed worthy of identification, and then retroactively established as distinctly Russian. The next chapter (**Chapter 5**: ‘The Drunkard in the Rain: a psychosocial analysis of surveys on Russianness’) picks up threads from the preceding discussion, starting with the discursive operation of splitting, and relating it to the greater split in Russian society. While the chapter represents an enrichment of already established observations and conclusions, as well as a more multifaceted pool of material, due to the greater number and diversity of respondents, it also offers analyses of discursive phenomena such as the delegation of affective investment to others as a means of protecting one’s own latent identification, the nature and function of certain signifiers of Russianness, and the primacy of the visual in identification. Both chapters in conjunction also tell the story of loss, that is, the loss of the good nation which is set up as an ideal but perpetually fails to live up to it.

Chapter 6 (‘Velvet Revolution or Frenzied Uteri – Making Sense of Pussy Riot’) is the first of two case studies of public discourses of identification with Russianness. It centres around discourses of rejection and (dis)identification as evident in the public responses to Pussy Riot in Russia. The emotional response to the group’s ‘punk prayer’ indicated that a collective nerve had been hit, especially when viewed in conjunction with protests that took place in Russia in 2011 and 2012. By examining the different registers of affect activated by the ‘punk prayer’, the chapter catalogues the ways in which Russia desires to see itself. The analysis suggests that in their rejection or championing of the group’s performance, participants in the debate surrounding Pussy Riot have found ways of both shifting the threat Pussy Riot represents, and of once again ‘enjoying the nation’. The second case study to which **Chapter 7** (‘Fantastic Mr President – The Masks, Myths and Mirrors of Putinism’) is dedicated, examines discourses that seek to elicit identification, and by extension, love in the populace, enabled by the primacy of representational

mechanisms to all elements of the discourse of Putinism. The chapter argues that by investigating the quasi-mythical instantiations and discourses surrounding Vladimir Putin's persona, it is possible to encounter the investments of Russia and Russians *in* (or, vice versa, their rejection *of*) a certain configuration of both authority and Russianness, as embodied in the figure of Putin. Examining the multitude of representation of Putin that have been produced during his presidency and stint as Prime Minister, the Russian president emerges as the master signifier of Putinism – a non-ideological, highly personalised edifice. This links it to the underlying theoretical concern with processes of identification with a leader or authority figures, as well as later variations on this, such as Adorno's examination of fascist propaganda.

Finally, **Chapter 8** (*Conclusion*) summarises the thesis' major findings, highlighting its theoretical and methodological contributions. One of the most surprising findings identified is the prevalence of image-rich discourses and signifiers. Their significance in subjects' discourses reinforces their role in imaginary identification, while recent events in Russia also point to the consequences of the construction and proliferation of mythological narratives. The conclusion also discusses the issue of temporality and temporal location in order to link the discourses analysed in the thesis – most of which were produced between 2010 and 2013 - to the developments of 2014. It is shown that the antagonisms and tensions of Russian society have not been resolved, but merely obscured by enjoyment in nationalistic sentiment and the recovery of a coveted 'lost object'.

Chapter II: Identification

By asking the young people to perform this act of imaginary identification, I wanted to see how/where this largely post-Soviet generation would (or would not) locate itself on the available symbolic map. (Oushakine, 2000:992)

In times of societal transformation, identities structured by previously existing roles and affiliations can become redundant, and new referents are needed to make sense of one's place in the social world. In terms of the project's aim to investigate discourses of identity from two angles, this entails looking at how existing societal and historical discourses of identity play themselves out on a subjective level, that is, how new identities are formed, and which signifiers assume a privileged position in these processes of identity formation. A psychoanalytic angle, with its emphasis on the unconscious mechanisms at work in any instance of identification, can provide useful insights, which an investigation relying on the self-transparency of subjects might overlook. The present chapter consists of two sections: the first part details conceptualisations of identification in psychoanalysis, and the second part discusses ways in which these notions can be applied to identifications with the group or nation, and to the aims of this study in particular.

Identification in Psychoanalysis

The unconscious constantly reveals the "failure" of identity. (Jacqueline Rose, 1987: 90)

But something we have learnt from the whole discussion of identification, in feminism and psychoanalysis, is the degree to which that structure of identification is always constructed through ambivalence. Always constructed through splitting. (Stuart Hall, 1988:47)

Since Freud's initial conceptualisation, identification has become one of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, regarded as integral to an understanding of the human psyche. In psychoanalytic thought identification is what enables individuals to mentally assume the place of the *other*, to relate to a world outside themselves, to make a move from monadic experience to inter-subjectivity: "A path leads from identification by way of imitation to empathy, that is, to the comprehension of the mechanism by means of

which we are enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life.” (Freud, 1921:110)

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud postulates that: "Identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person" (Freud, 1921:107). One's caregivers become the original sources of one's ideals, as well as one's first love objects, in that taking one caregiver as an ideal appears at the same time as a libidinal attachment to the other. In fact, during the *first mode of identification*, "... in the individual's primitive oral phase, object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other " (Freud, 1923:29). In the infant the affective bond takes on the form of identifying with the parent. At the same time it develops a "true object-cathexis", an attachment, to the mother, which according to Freud eventually results in the wish to replace the father, of wanting to have what he has. The initial positive identification then takes on a "hostile colouring" - "identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone's removal" (Freud, 1921:105). The failure of gaining possession finds expression in the child's attempt to be *like* the parent, say, to take the father as his role model and emulate him in his behavior – this sequence of jealousy and subsequent identification continues in adulthood:

Even today the social feelings arise in the individual as a superstructure built upon impulses of jealous rivalry against his brothers and sisters. Since the hostility cannot be satisfied, an identification with the former rival develops. (Freud, 1923:37)

As a result of repression, certain characteristics of the beloved person are adopted as a way of incorporating, of 'having' some features of the individual to which one is attached. In other words, in the *second mode of identification*, "in a regressive way it becomes a substitute for a libidinal object-tie" (Freud, p.1921: 107). The *third* and final, *hysterical* mode of identification discussed by Freud refers to instances when a libidinal tie is not the founding characteristic of the relationship, and instead it is rather the case that "one ego has perceived a significant analogy with another upon one point" (ibid.). For example, identification can thus be constructed on a shared openness to experience certain feelings. The case used by Freud to illustrate this point is a group of girls in a boarding school, whose hysterical fits are not based on wanting to be *like* each other, but on wanting to *have* what one of the girls possesses, i.e. a secret lover. Put succinctly, the

difference between the second and third modes of identification is whether assuming the place of the other would allow the subject *to have* something or *to be* something. The second mode requires an object-tie, whereas the third mode requires an awareness of, and identification with, the place of another.

In groups, specifically those groups Freud discusses (the church and the army), he makes a distinction between two types of identification. Identification with the leader is of the vertical kind: the group member feels a strong attachment to the leader, but as no true reciprocation is possible, individuals retain the bond by making the leader their ideal, installing him (or her) in their egos. It is useful to remember that the qualities of this ideal have much in common with one's first objects of love, and of subsequent identification, thereby retaining a similar degree of authority. The second, 'horizontal' type of identification, the mutual bond between its members, is based on the recognition of an "important emotional quality" - the shared love for the leader:

A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego. (Freud, 1921:116)

The feelings group members have for the leader are perhaps more equivocal than initially indicated. The key word here is ambivalence, similar to that the infant experiences in the relationship with its parents – in the case of the group these feelings are repressed, or projected onto outsiders, as they would otherwise threaten to destabilize the group's coherence.

In his analysis of the phenomenon of melancholia (*Mourning and Melancholia*, 1917), Freud also provides an illustration of pathological identification "with an object that is renounced or lost, as a substitute for that object" (Freud, 1921:109) - the lost object is introjected into the ego, as a way of not relinquishing what is lost, in other words, "the shadow of the object has fallen upon the ego" (Freud, 1917:249). The self-denigration that represents such a characteristic feature of the melancholic is thus in fact a denigration of the object. This theorisation of melancholia as a pathological form of object-relation, as a failure to relinquish the object with which another type of relationship cannot be established, was later re-conceptualised by Freud as underlying all

ego formation: “[T]he character of the ego is a precipitate of the abandoned object-cathexes and it contains the history of those object choices” (Freud, 1923: 29). Judith Butler (1990, 1997) utilizes the idea of melancholic identification to illustrate how the assumption of a gendered position entails a loss – the loss of the other sex as a love object or the “foreclosure of certain forms of love” (Butler, 1997:23). An identification as homosexual hereby functions not as a potentially destabilizing force to the order of gendered positions, but instead frequently serves to strengthen them in its perceived quality as an identification in *opposition* to the hegemonic order.

In summary, identification is both ambivalent and inherently precarious. It involves feelings of love as well as aggression, attempts at emulation as well as rivalry.

Identification is an experience that is predicated on failure. We can never fully be like the *other*, and neither can we fully have or incorporate the other into ourselves, even though identification may represent an attempt to achieve just that. It oscillates between a desire to have and a wish to be like the other. Later, Lacan was to group these aspects under the notion of *imaginary identification*.

However, Freud’s account of subject formation has not been met with unanimous agreement. The individual’s integration into, and identification with, the group as Freud saw it has received its fair share of resistance and critique, even within the broader psychoanalytic community. Victor Wolfenstein (1990) objects to Freud’s ideas about group formation on the grounds that it is based on what he perceives to be an erroneous conceptualisation of an individual that pre-dates group formation: “the individual’ is an element in a group phantasy” (Wolfenstein, 1990:174). To him, this notion of the individual is in fact an effect of group membership: negative emotions that accompany this membership are projected onto the group, leading to the perceived dichotomy between individual and the collective. The real focus of Wolfenstein’s critique, however, is that by starting with an individual, rather than the group, an application of Freud’s theorization of identification is at times less than helpful when one tries to utilize it to explain specific historico-political moments:

Freud’s psychological individualism and mystification of history restrict the political theoretical utility of Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921) and preclude the recognition that psychoanalysis is, *eo ipso*, a social psychology. (Wolfenstein, 1990:178)

Does this imply that we must dismiss identification as a concept without explanatory value beyond the initial familial dyad and triad? Looking at post-Freudian contributions, which re-conceptualise the individual as a product of familial structures as well as discursive and ideological formations, it appears that in order to make the concept more relevant, one may have to locate every instance of identification more specifically in a given set of socio-historic circumstances. Thereby one ends up somewhat complicating the initial Freudian account, without, however, losing his ideas regarding the libidinal ties that underlie the formation of groups.

Ideal ego & ego ideal

The Ego is an other. (Jacques Lacan, 1954:9)

Perhaps the most compelling illustration of the fundamentally intersubjective nature of identity is that the subject needs others in order to form its own ego: "It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified" (Laplanche, Pontalis, & Nicholson-Smith, 1973:205). In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud details how the ego is established through "successive identifications, resulting in the production of a love object for another agency (i.e., the Super-Ego)" (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2009:393). The child's primary identification, as detailed above, is so similar to object-cathexis or love, as to be indistinguishable from it. Beyond this initial identification, the ego develops through subsequent identifications, which keep occurring throughout adolescence and adulthood. Freud does not exclude the possibility that these can come into conflict with each other, with potentially troubling consequences:

[...] we cannot avoid giving our attention for a moment longer to the ego's object-identifications. If they obtain the upper hand and become too numerous, unduly powerful and incompatible with one another, a pathological outcome will not be far off. [...] Even when things do not go so far as this, there remains the question of conflicts between the various identifications into which the ego comes apart, conflicts which cannot after all be described as entirely pathological. (Freud, 1923:31)

Identifications never lose their relation with the initial object, with whom one may have identified in part due to the impossibility of establishing another type of relationship. Two important conclusions can be drawn from this: firstly, the true origin of the Ego lies

in the *other*. Secondly, “Freud understands the development of the Ego as a never-ending attempt to return to the state of primary narcissism, albeit via the ideal criteria as put forward by other(s)” (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2009:395), meaning that the subject wants to return to a state of perceived oneness and self-sufficiency via the path and criteria set out by one’s parents, although these criteria may become modified with further identifications in later life. However, the awareness that identity construction is mediated through others, that there is an *otherness* at the heart of the subject, is only the starting point for a further investigation into processes of identity formation. In order to gain a better understanding of this, we need to turn to the distinction, made by Freud and developed further by Lacan, between ego ideal and ideal-ego.

Freud first refers to an ideal ego (Ideal-Ich) in his essay *On Narcissism* in 1914. In fact, he never makes a concrete distinction between the ideal ego and the ego ideal (Ich-Ideal), but later authors such as Daniel Lagache relate the **ideal ego** to primary processes of identification with powerful parental figures and see it as an essentially narcissistic formation, connected to early feelings of omnipotence and self-sufficiency of the ego. Lagache also regards it as the foundation for later *heroic identifications*, that is, identifications with charismatic historical or contemporary figures (this instance of identification will become important in a discussion of the role of ‘fantastic’ Vladimir Putin).

The notion of the **ego ideal** assumes greater importance in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, as the “principle on which the constitution of human groups is based”(Laplanche, et al., 1973:144). Freud sees it as clearly differentiated from the ego, in fact as a result of the ego having become “divided, fallen apart into two pieces” (Freud, 1921:109). The ego ideal shares some of the functions of the **superego** (to be fully conceptualised in 1923 with the publication of *The Ego and the Id*), in that it operates as an observer and moral conscience: “It is easy to show that the ego ideal answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man“(Freud, 1923:37). At the same time it originates, like the ideal ego, in earlier, infantile identifications. Cases of “amorous fascination, for subordination to the hypnotists and for submission to leaders” (Laplanche, et al., 1973:144) are to be explained as the subject substituting the ego ideal for another person.

From these brief definitions, it may become clear that the distinctions between ego ideal, ideal ego and superego are in fact rather subtle: all involve identifications with powerful others, thus having an impact on the subject's self-regard. Lacan develops these concepts into three distinct entities or registers (Imaginary, Symbolic and Real), all three of which can provide clues about the subject's integration into the social.

Identification in Lacan

Lacan's initial theorisation of identification can be located in his writing on the 'mirror stage' in infant development, which he wrote in 1949. According to Lacan, prior to this stage the child experiences its bodily self as disjointed, its existence as helpless and chaotic. The experience of seeing its image reflected in the mirror then becomes a key episode. According to Lacan, the reflection may at first conjure up feelings of rivalry and aggression as it embodies an ideal image of wholeness. The child overcomes these feelings by *identifying* with the image, which enables it to see itself as a harmonious whole. In fact, the prerequisite to – as well as in this case, the partial resolution of – feelings of jealous rivalry is the ability to imagine oneself in the place of the other (Parker, 2007).

Here, the ego thus arises in reaction to an image of (illusory) wholeness – an Ideal Ego – and represents the child's entry into the realm of the *imaginary*. Importantly, it involves an element of *misrecognition*, in that the subject comes to associate with an image whose very level of integration – both physically and psychically – it will continue to strive for and assume possible. Psychologists such as Michael Billig (2006) have criticized this rather unorthodox account of ego development. However, rather than attacking it purely on the grounds of a lack of scientific credibility – a popular strategy for undermining psychoanalysis – Billig takes offence at Lacan's privileging of the visual in psychic life:

Indeed, one might argue that the popularity of the mirror trope in contemporary cultural analysis is yet another example of the over-evaluation of the visual modality in much western philosophy and psychology. (Billig, 2006:16)

Later on Lacan himself becomes increasingly dissatisfied with his first account of identification and, while he retains the emphasis on misrecognition and alienation, in his later modifications, "the stress falls less on its 'historical value', and ever more on its structural value" (Evans, 1996:118). By 1956 Lacan states that "The mirror stage is far from a mere phenomenon which occurs in the development of the child. It illustrates the

conflictual nature of the dual relationship” (Lacan, 1956 in Evans, 1996:118) It is helpful, however, to remember how he, like Freud, foregrounds the strongly narcissistic components of ego development. If identification is perhaps less about actual specular images than initially thought, it is nevertheless beneficial to retain the importance of the dimension of looking, and *being seen*. Additionally, with the contemporary pervasiveness of images and the theorization of post-modernity as ‘hyperreality’ (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988), Lacan’s initial account of imaginary identification has once more gained currency.

Lacan’s subsequent interpretation of the importance of the Ego Ideal in *symbolic identification* takes into account the mystery of what it is that the other expects or wants of the subject. The subject’s Ego Ideals are treated as potential answers to the question of what it is the other desires:

Lacan starts from the axiom that the other’s desire is essentially enigmatic to a subject. It comes across as a threatening riddle. He assumes that in their contact with others, human subjects invariably, but not necessarily consciously, ask themselves the question: “What does she/he want from me?” (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2009:397)

In order to make itself likeable or desirable to the other, the subject assumes or identifies with elements or ‘traits’ (signifiers) that appear to have attracted the other’s (for example its mother’s) desire. By insisting that the other’s desire is at the subject’s core, Lacan exceeds intersubjectivity and arrives at *alienation* as the central principle of identification. Each element which the subject may experience as most integral to its being is therefore originally an answer to the mystery of the other’s desire.

Underneath these identificatory layers is something that resists symbolization – referred to by Lacan as *the real* of the drive – but which nevertheless exerts a disturbing effect on the subject and thwarts any attempts at constructing an integrated identity, in the meaning given to it by ego psychology. However, this antagonism is not only due to the basic split between the symbolic and imaginary orders on the one hand and the real on the other – there is also a split on the level of the symbolic between the different signifiers that provide the basic material for any articulation of a subject’s identity. These elements can enter into conflict with each other, as previously discussed in Freud’s account of identification, leading to the Ego “coming apart”, splitting, as in his topographical model. The subject never feels fully represented by a signifier - a signifier

which predates him or her - and being conflated with this signifier can be anxiety – provoking, as it entails questions of who the subject is in the eyes of little others and the Big Other.

Both Freud's and Lacan's accounts of identification do not treat the process as one of increasing removal from an authentic core. In the clinical encounter, it is less the content of representations or signifiers underlying specific identifications that is of interest, but rather their *function*, and what these have failed to subsume or integrate. If to identify requires the ability to represent, then this representation only ever succeeds to a certain degree. It is the failure to represent and subsequently assume a signifier in its entirety that may provide one of the important motivations behind further identifications in adulthood.

In summary, for Lacan, the **ideal ego** represents the subject's idealised self-image, and the term *imaginary identification* applies to the mechanism by which we identify with the “image in which we appear likeable to ourselves” (Žižek, 1989:105). **Ego ideal** and *symbolic identification*, on the other hand, refer to a positioning of oneself in a place “*from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable” (author's italics). It is the location from which this image takes on value in the gaze of the big Other - the big Other being “the virtual symbolic order, the network that structures reality for us” (Žižek, 2003). Finally, the **superego** is “this same agency in its revengeful, sadistic, punishing, aspect” (Žižek, 2006:132). The ideal, 'imaginary' ego is what Lacan refers to as the 'little other'; the ego ideal is the reference point of the subject's symbolic identifications, and the superego with its impossible, relentless demands on the subject, is an instantiation of the Real.

Identification, Introjection, Incorporation

In order to avoid further confusion of a number of psychoanalytic terms which all ostensibly refer to psychic (and actual) processes of 'taking in', this may be a suitable point at which to provide brief definitions of their respective meanings. The umbrella term that is thought to encompass introjection, incorporation and identification is **internalisation**. Freud himself never fully distinguished between these terms and at times uses them interchangeably. All of them are seen as integral to ego development, as they involve both a taking in of external prohibitions, and the establishment of a

boundary between self and object. The most important distinction in the way it has been applied both in and outside the clinic is that between introjection and identification.

In its role in the developmental trajectory, identification is closely related to both incorporation, seen as a manifestation of the oral impulse, and introjection, which can be regarded as its mental counterpart. It is both a normal developmental process and a defence mechanism, as in projective identification, whereby an affect which has become intolerable to the psyche is split off and externalised, i.e. projected outward onto another person. Whether more fleeting or integral in ego development - identifications occur throughout a person's life and form the basis of any form of engagement with the outside world.

Introjection is often used to refer to all form of internalisation whereby the ego forms a relationship with an object, including, confusingly, the incorporation of the object into the ego in melancholia, as it was utilised by Freud who simultaneously referred to it as (melancholic) identification. According to Sandler, the subject constantly engages in a "perceptual taking in" of the external world (Sandler, 1989: 10), which leads to both the construction of fantasy objects in the child, and superego introjection. However, the fate of objects internalised differs sharply in both processes: "From a representational point of view it is valuable to make a sharp distinction between identification as a modification of the self-representation on the one hand, and introjection as the setting up of unconscious, internal "phantom" companions, felt to be a part of one's inner world, yet external to one's self-representation, on the other" (ibid: 11).

Identification and the Social

I therefore shall adopt an overall, comprehensive approach to the problem, taking the position that the identification process, in its each time singular specificity for each historically instituted society, and identification itself are moments of the totality of society and that these moments make no sense, either positively or negatively, when detached from this social totality. (Castoriadis, 1989:208)

A type of parallel can be drawn between the Lacanian concept of the big Other and Georg Herbert Mead's account of the child's encounter with the 'Generalised Other'. It is defined by Mead as "an organized and generalized attitude" (Mead, Morris, & Morris, 1934), an amalgamation of individual attitudes into a symbolic unity, that informs the

way individuals regulate and judge their own conduct. It is through introjection of the generalised other that the subject is integrated into the social world. Mead's notion of the self is thus in part a result of identification with an *imaginary* collectivity. This is perhaps where the two concepts diverge: while the generalised other shares some of the regulating and structuring functions of the big Other, its origin is to be located within the imaginary. The big Other, contrastingly:

[...] transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan equates this radical alterity with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic. Indeed, the big Other is the symbolic insofar as it is particularized for each subject. The Other is thus both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that other subject. (Evans, 1996: 136)

It is equally important to note that in Mead's conceptualisation, much of the ambivalence and instability accompanying identity formation, which is so essential to psychoanalysis, is lost. While he allows for social conflict, self-formation is essentially seen as a process of assimilation and adaptation. Psychoanalysts, and Lacanian thinkers in particular, on the other hand, stress the alienating effects of identification, as well as the fragility of any identity at which we might arrive, as:

[...] human construction is never able to institute itself as a closed and self-contained order. There is always something which frustrates all efforts to reach an exhaustive representation of the world – whether natural or social. (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003:132)

Symbolic order

For this study, and its focus on experiences of structural dislocation, the idea of a symbolic order is of particular significance. The concept was introduced by Levi-Strauss, who claimed that "any culture may be looked upon as an ensemble of symbolic systems, in the front rank of which are to be found language, marriage laws, economic relations, art, science and religion" (Lévi-Strauss, 1987:15). Its nearest sociological or social psychological extension can once more be found in the work of the symbolic interactionists, and their insistence that symbols are the means through which we structure our reality ([Blumer, 1986](#)).

The symbolic thus denotes the effective operation of collective customs and institutions which work not by reference to the intrinsic meaning of symbols, but

on the basis of how they locate subjects, by generating the symbolic co-ordinates that enable such subjects to take up positions in social reality ([Hook, 2011a:190](#)).

In terms of processes of identification, it is important to remember that symbolic identification is seen by Lacan to precede imaginary identification, as it is the symbolic realm from which we retrieve and judge the imaginary forms after which we model ourselves. The symbolic precedes the individual, and by being located in a social order, he or she is endowed with a number of roles, a symbolic mandate, with which to identify, which in turn informs the imaginary aspect of identification.

However, the relationship between the two types or levels of identification is by no means entirely circular and smooth-running. There is a gap between the roles, which the individual is offered or assigned in a given structure, and the imaginary work it requires in order to fully *assume* an identity. Any interpretation *of* and identification *with* the symbolic order is an attempt to overcome this tension, to temporarily fix meaning for the subject. There is “no meta-guarantee of the validity of the symbolic order within which the subject dwells” (Žižek, 1996:136) – when taking up a symbolic mandate, such as that of ‘teacher’ or ‘wife’, effort is involved in establishing its meaning for the subject; meaning which is thus established retroactively. At the same time, “identity can never be fully totalised by the symbolic, for what it fails to order will emerge within the imaginary as a disorder, a site where identity is contested.” (Butler, 1997:97).

Broader discursive formations

If the social and cultural co-ordinates underlying these roles or mandates change, a gap opens up between the meaning that the individual previously derived from them, and the new order. Ernesto Laclau describes this as a space between the subject and the dominant, *hegemonic* discourse and endows structural dislocations with powers that are both traumatic in that ‘they threaten identities’, and productive in that they can serve as ‘the foundation on which new identities are constituted’ (Laclau, 1990:45). This gap between the new order and anachronistic discourse can be temporarily sutured through the creation of myths, “spaces of representation” (Laclau, 1990), which in some cases lead to the creation of new social imaginaries – a process which he sees as occurring more and more frequently in contemporary, de-traditionalised societies.

In a manner reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, Laclau mentions how subjects are created partially through the structure into which they are born (Laclau, 1990). In line with other post-structuralist thinkers, he gives preference to the term 'subject position' over that of 'identity'. Rather than seeing the self as a fixed entity, 'subject position' indicates a particular configuration of subjectivity. An individual can identify or be identified with more than one subject position, such as that of 'Russian' or 'husband' or 'teacher'. Which mode of subjectivity gets activated under what circumstances is centred on the debate over how much agency the subject has in forming these positions. Therefore, before moving on to a discussion of psychoanalytic, and specifically Lacanian approaches to discourse analysis in the next chapter, it is worthwhile reiterating that, despite the structuring and perhaps deceptively a-psychological status of the symbolic order, it requires affective investment in order to operate at the individual level:

The important point is to realise that without this cathectic (affective) investment in an object [...] there will not be a symbolic order either. So the affective, the cathectic investment, is not the other of the symbolic but its very precondition. (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2010:236)

For the current research project, which aims to locate moments of national identification in discourse, it is assumed that there are moments when and where the subject feels he or she coincides with the signifier. A discourse analysis therefore needs to delineate what marks these moments of seeming authenticity, and, conversely, determine when and why the gap between oneself and the signifier is felt most acutely. If recurring patterns emerge, this could point to the fact that conducting this type of analysis can be a way of examining the role of fantasmatic identification.

National Identification

Each individual is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego ideal upon the most various models. Each individual therefore has a share in numerous group minds - those of his race, of his class, of his creed, of his nationality, etc. - and he can also raise himself above them to the extent of having a scrap of independence and originality. (Freud, 1921:129)

Judith Butler points out that identification is never fully accomplished – in order to approximate any sense of an identity, the subject needs to constantly reiterate and

reproduce this identification: “Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability” (Butler, 1993:105). She opens our mind to such questions as what the subject is trying to attain by identifying, or refusing to identify with an existing position, postulating that, for example, “a radical refusal to identify with a given position suggests that on some level an identification has already taken place, an identification that is made and disavowed” (ibid: 113).

Butler treats sexed positions as being marked out in the symbolic order – “there are sexed positions that persist within a symbolic domain which pre-exist their appropriation by individuals” (Butler, 1993:97). In order to heed to this “symbolic demand to assume a sexed position” (Butler, 1993:96), subjects need to appropriate these positions, which in practise means an appropriation in the sense of engaging in the fantasy of “approximating that symbolic site” (ibid.). At first it appears that this ‘symbolic demand’ does not find its equivalent within a national framework. This is possibly due the secondary nature of the nation or wider community in an individual’s development, i.e. the fact that nation and national identity play little or no role in the initial dyad and triad with one’s caregivers. Additionally, one needs to question the status of the nation in the symbolic order. If the symbolic order is something that pre-dates specific cultural formations or their approbation by individuals, and is itself a way of structuring such formations, does it contain a mandate which demands one take up a place, or position within a national body?

At the same time, notions of what constitutes a specific national identity as it is situated in a societal context infiltrate a multitude of interactions and public debates, and by the time a child enters school it encounters a discourse of the nation, which constructs the child as its subject and citizen. There are, therefore, recurring moments throughout an individual’s life when it is asked to assume a configuration of national identity. The type of subject position assumed is thus directly linked to processes of identification, and specifically, which signifiers captivate the subject, and in what way. On top of this it frequently appears that in order to sustain themselves, national ideologies attempt to engulf other categories within the symbolic, such as gender or kinship relations, so that a threat to national identities can become a threat to the stability of these positions as well. Similarly, a national ideology potentially needs to take into account symbolic roles (one

example is the integral role of an image of the ‘good German mother’ in National Socialist ideology) in order to become successful.

If we therefore pursue Butler’s line of thinking and try to apply it to a form of national identity, the challenge for the individual then becomes one of approximating a site that is not fixed in the symbolic. On top of this, if one keeps in mind Anderson’s work on the *imaginary* – here in the sense of *mythical* - nature of national communities - in times following societal or political upheaval, this site then becomes difficult if not impossible to locate. Oushakine (2000) describes post-soviet Russian subjectivities in terms of their inability to assume such a position, which he relates to fundamental disturbances in the discursive field. To him, contemporary Russia does not offer the individual any subject positions that would adequately represent ‘post-soviet man/woman’, and Russians are thus forced to rely on past signifiers, which remain ever-present if not in content – a content which has become historically redundant - then in form. One, somewhat anecdotal example provided by him is the use of the Russian national anthem: a new anthem was introduced in 1990 to replace the old Soviet hymn, but proved so unpopular that then-President Putin re-instated the old anthem with new words, albeit written by the same author who had composed the lyrics for the Soviet anthem.

However, the crisis of identification that is perhaps specific to post-soviet Russia in its ‘state of permanent transition’ is merged with, and possibly enhanced by, the crisis of meaning that has beset Western (post-)modernity - a crisis which Russia is fated to repeat at an accelerated pace as it rejoins the trajectory of modernity (as argued in Habermas, 1990). According to Castoriadis (1989), all modern Western societies are undergoing a crisis that affects the identification process - a process, which then in turn serves to perpetuate this predicament. His comments on the state of society are certainly reminiscent of what has been termed the ‘crisis of investiture’ (Santner, 1996) of modernity. However, here the consequences for the subject appear to be somewhat more traumatic. The status of community in the symbolic has become eroded, and a community’s “existence as a meaning-giving, symbolic whole can no longer—and perhaps never again—be experienced as fully trustworthy or of ultimate value”(ibid: 145). Its origin is seen to lie in the central paradox of post-Enlightenment: that “the subject is solicited by a will to autonomy in the name of the very community that is thereby undermined, whose very substance thereby passes over into the subject” (ibid).

Returning specifically to *national* identification, Žižek insists that “the element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship towards a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated” (Žižek, 1993:111). He sees this enjoyment as the key to understanding a community’s coherence in opposition to other communities – each society attempts to cover over its inherent antagonism by ‘outsourcing’ it. There is, of course, no pre-existing, positive content to signifiers such as *Russianness*. In order to bring into being a society or nation, this very nation first needs to stage a threat or loss, so that this quality under threat can become an essential part of the nation’s identity. An example frequently employed by him to illustrate this is National Socialism’s use of an alleged Jewish-Bolshevik plot threatening an essentially German culture and way of life, when Germany as a sovereign nation had in fact only been in existence since 1871. This type of discourse continues to be employed in contemporary anti-immigration campaigns. In Žižekian terms, this occurs whenever a society attempts to cover over its inherent antagonism or split, the fact that in reality it does not exist, by ‘outsourcing’ this conflict. This is perhaps best illustrated by the eruption of nationalist conflicts after the breakup of the former Eastern bloc. Socialism, according to Žižek, functioned as a kind of positive ‘guarantor’ for the social pact. While allowing Eastern Europeans to keep a type of ‘cynical distance’ from its ideology, it nevertheless functioned as a ‘social glue’ holding society together. Citizens of former socialist countries experienced the disappearance of this ‘big Other’ and subsequent upheaval as a traumatic encounter with the Real (Žižek, 1993:129). Aggressive displays of nationalism towards ethnic minorities and neighbouring countries can thus be seen as desperate attempts to prevent a total disintegration of society.

However, this is not to say that in order to identify with one’s country, one needs to engage in xenophobic speech or practices. Returning to the notion of enjoyment, Žižek claims that: “A nation exists only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths.” (Ibid: 112). This is a statement which is strongly reminiscent of Santner’s verdict on judge Schreber’s “cultivation of an ensemble of “perverse” practices, identifications, and fantasies” (Santner, 1996:145) allowing him to find his way back into a context of “basic human solidarity” (ibid.). The main difference here is Žižek’s emphasis on the social

nature of these practices, where Santner stresses the importance of finding a personal set of rituals which would help one engage with one's nation or community. For any discourse analysis, this would entail looking for the myths and fantasies structuring the interviewees' representations of Russianness, while keeping in mind that their decision to leave the country, albeit temporarily, may signify a gesture of refusal of identification, or indeed that this gesture of refusal may enable the individual to create a series of private practises which allow it to create its 'Own Private Russia'.

Love and identification

We are aware that what we have been able to contribute towards the explanation of the libidinal structure of groups leads back to the distinction between the ego and the ego ideal and to the double kind of tie which this makes possible - identification, and putting the object in the place of the ego ideal. (Freud, 1921:96)

When one speaks of identification, must one not also speak of love? For Freud, the development of a 'true object-cathexis' appears around the same time as identification in a child's developmental trajectory, and both are ways of establishing a relationship with the object. According to Mladen Dolar's recapitulation of the two processes, the main difference lies in whether the object has been introjected into the ego, as in identification, or has been put in place of the ego ideal, as in love. In fact, identification often takes place when a loving bond has become impossible, be it through the foreclosure of desire as detailed by Butler, or the loss of the object through death or the end of a relationship. In line with these similarities, the bond underlying group formation can be one of love or identification. In fact, if we recall Freud's statement regarding the mechanism behind the third mode of identification as it operates in groups – the recognition of a shared emotional quality such as love for the leader, or an ideal – it can be both.

However, before the formation of groups must come the formation of subjects. Previously we discussed how the ego consists of the 'sediment' of previous identifications – attachments that served as "the resolution of desire" (Butler, 1997:102), so that that the ego becomes "the residue of desire, the effect of incorporations which, Freud argues in *The Ego and the Id*, trace a lineage of attachment and loss" (ibid.). Lacan, and Butler after him, share the notion that the subject comes about through a forced choice. For Butler, this means, "no subject emerges without a 'passionate attachment' to

those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent (even if that passion is ‘negative’ in the psychoanalytic sense)” (1997:7). In order to materialise as a subject, the individual cannot become fully aware of the conditions that created it and its respective ‘passionate attachments’ – that the love it feels for its primary caregivers is necessary to ensure its survival and is thus created out of a situation of utter dependency, in which by definition no true ‘free decision’ of whom to love or not to love can be made. Becoming a subject thus involves a process of ‘subjectivation’ (from the French ‘*assujétissement*’, which Butler adopts from Foucault), which in Butler’s definition becomes an attachment to the very agency that subordinates the subject.

Dolar, like Butler, concludes that it takes love to become a subject. He takes the Althusserian notion of interpellation and demonstrates how it does not suffice as an explanatory mechanism of how ideology turns individuals into subjects. He, too, takes his cue from Lacan and his ‘impossible choice’ – becoming a subject by entering the symbolic entails a loss and brings with it alienation. The individual must remain unaware of the obligatory nature of the choice (which was never truly a choice in the first place, as to exist outwith the symbolic is itself an impossibility) and must carry on as if it was made freely. In ideology, love “can serve as a link between the most private and a social bond” as it masks the external origin of subjectivity and endows it with a veneer of authenticity in order to facilitate the marriage of external, contingent materiality and interiority of the subject. The type of attachment which originates in a forced choice - in other words, when there is no choice as to its object - can be said to apply to one’s country or nation as well: “The contingent circumstances of one’s birth are transformed into an object of love; what is unavoidable becomes ethically sanctioned” (Dolar, 1993:82).

In Sara Ahmed’s words “identification is a form of love; it is an active kind of loving, which moves or pulls the subject towards another” (Ahmed, 2004:126). In a Butlerian vein, she also shows how identifying with someone, and hence with that person’s desire, requires a dis-identification with the *object* of desire – in order to want to have it, I cannot simultaneously want to be it. When we love, the object placed in the position of the ego ideal allows the subject to see itself as lovable – thus by loving I am given a chance to idealise myself. Ahmed insists that this logic is also in operation in the establishment of a group identity. She emphasizes how non-reciprocated love can intensify the affect,

similarly to when the loss of the object leads to it becoming firmly lodged in on the ego as in melancholia: “Love may be especially crucial in the event of the failure of the nation to deliver its promise for the good life” (Ahmed, 2004:131). The nation cannot return one’s love. In Ahmed’s argumentation, this failure in effect serves to “increase the investment in the nation” and, consequently, one’s attachment to it, rather than decreasing it after being forced to justify this love despite all the nation’s shortcomings, in which case the cost would perhaps appear to be all too great. Antidotes to such a possible ‘depression’, or rather, palliatives that seemingly solve the problem of how to overcome a sense of disappointment in the nation are listed by her as both a postponement of potential national greatness to future generations, or nostalgia for a past that never was. Another common strategy is the use and naming of an other as that which prevents the nation from achieving unity (see Žižek, 1989). Narratives of love for the nation therefore frequently become narratives of loss, as national lore appears to be in need of an ‘obstacle’ which keeps it from achieving union with the desired object.

For Ahmed, the content of a national ideal is unimportant – it takes shape in the act of loving, “the ideal is the effect of the process of idealization” (Ahmed, 2004:131). At the same time, the nation is not without form – it is an *image* that each of its members tries to approximate, but which remains unattainable to some (she cites Kristeva’s example of the veiled woman in modern-day France). A special case is the ideal of multiculturalism, whereby the *act of loving* each other in one’s differences becomes the ideal, and, subsequently, an imperative. The supposed love for difference thus contains its own failure, or blind spot, as being different only ever means being equally loyal to all cultures – giving preference to one in any area is regarded as a betrayal.

A fundamental problem, however, remains - a problem that has been in existence perhaps since the initial Freudian account: love for an ideal such as the nation, and a person such as a leader are conflated. But can they really be treated as one and the same in terms of underlying psychic processes, including identification and loss? In a Lacanian vein one would treat an ideal as a ‘master signifier’ – variable in content, significant only in its ability to tie other, contingent elements together. A loving relationship, on the other hand, may be based on ‘misrecognition’, but never does the other come to us as an empty vessel waiting to be filled with psychic or ideological content – a relationship between individuals, be it based on love, identification, or a sequence of both, does not

leave either party unchanged. If we assume that the relationship with an idea, or a ‘master signifier’, should be distinguished from that with another subject, then what is it exactly that separates the two? Presumably, it is its very emptiness that distinguishes the master signifier, whereby notions such as ‘nation’ can obtain an almost accidental set of meanings, which, albeit to varying degrees, manage to capture the imagination of large groups of individuals:

[..] in the ideological space float signifiers like ‘freedom’, ‘state’, ‘justice’, ‘peace’...and then the chain is supplemented with some master-signifier (‘Communism’) which retroactively determines their (Communist) meaning. (Žižek, 1989:113)

If the content of any national ideal, however, is to such a strong degree dependent on individual fantasy which enables the subject to assume this ideal as its own, that is, to *identify* with it, then how can we even endeavor to study these ideals and their assumption by subjects on a collective scale? It serves the researcher well to remember here that these fantasies – social fantasy – nevertheless remain anchored in the conditions specific to a society: “[...] the fact such an economy remains tied to the Other (of prevailing societal-historical norms, ideological values, etc.) means that a regularity of sorts is nonetheless obtained in such fantasies ” (Hook, 2011b: 130).

Pathological identifications

*In Freud’ view, we become what we cannot have,
and we desire (and punish) what we are compelled to disown.
But why these choices – why can’t we do both and something else as well?
- and why are they the choices? (Butler, 1997:157)*

Freud detailed how the ego itself is formed through the internalisation of lost objects; that in melancholia, for the ego it can become a way of establishing a relationship with an object, which would not be possible otherwise (Rauch, 1998). Klein described how it could be an almost violent act, how in *projective identification* the individual colonises the other’s psyche in a desperate attempt to ward off threats to the ego. Butler claims that the subject may at times identify with another’s position exactly so as to *disidentify* with its existing identity position:

Or it may be that certain identifications and affiliations are made certain sympathetic connections amplified, precisely in order to institute a disidentification with a position that seems too saturated with injury or aggression, one that might, as a consequence, be occupiable only through imagining the loss of viable identity altogether. Hence, the peculiar logic in the sympathetic gesture by which one objects to an injury done to another to deflect attention from an injury done to oneself, a gesture that then becomes the vehicle of displacement by which one feels for oneself through and as the other.” (Butler, 1993:100)

This may apply in particular to a certain mode of national identification, where subjects openly reject the possibility of a straightforward identification with a nation or national ideal, and feel the need to maintain and voice a minimal, “cynical” distance between themselves and a particular identity constellation. In order to avoid too much ‘injury to oneself’, the subject can then only take offense *as if* on behalf of another subject.

The abovementioned forms of (dis)identification all serve as solutions to problems – a given position, such as the potential loss of the object, becomes intolerable for the subject and a certain mode of identification serves to prolong the object’s existence, or to avoid an exposure to what seems too great an injury to the psyche. However, this still leaves one with the question of when or under what conditions an identification becomes problematic, or even pathological. There are, of course, examples of pathological identifications *in the clinical sense*, such as that of Judge Schreber, whose every act of identification presupposes an act of splitting and dividing up the other. Where Freud identified the origin of these paranoid identifications as lying in disavowed homosexual desire, Santner (1996) suggests that the case of Judge Schreber is indicative of the fact that:

[...] we cross the threshold of that era where and when those symbolic resources no longer address the subject where he or she most profoundly “lives,” which is, beginning at least with the European Enlightenment, the negative space hollowed out by the will to autonomy and self-reflexivity. (Santner, 1996:145)

This ‘crisis of investiture’ carries as its consequence “the inability of subjects to assume symbolic mandates: what prevents them from fulfilling the act of symbolic identification” (Žižek, 1997:13)³¹. Therefore, even if Schreber’s illness is enabled by

³¹ See also Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen’s essay on the “The Oedipus Problem in Freud and Lacan” (*Critical Inquiry* 20 [Winter 1994]: 267–82): “Our societies, on the other hand, are defined by a general crisis of

certain facets of his biography, chiefly among them his upbringing by an hyper-disciplinary and repressive father, Santner also sees it as representative of, or conditioned by:

...the central paradox of modernity: that the subject is solicited by a will to autonomy in the name of the very community that is thereby undermined, whose very substance thereby passes over into the subject. (Santner, 1996, *ibid.*)

He treats Schreber's "cultivation of an ensemble of "perverse" practices, *identifications*" (*ibid.*, my italics) as one answer to the problem of modern communities' inability to interpellate the subject in its name. It can become a way of relating to and assuming a position in society without resorting to, or submitting oneself to totalitarian projects which promise to heal this rift by a double-movement of disavowal of its existence, and the simultaneous staging of a threat by external forces (see Žižek, 1997).

The problem confronting us is thus one of dynamics in society where making an identification can be *injurious* to the psyche. If it is assumed that we keep making identifications throughout our lives, yet have little or no autonomy over where and when we undertake these acts of identification, then this seems almost inevitable. Another potential issue that needs to be flagged up is the use of the language of pathology itself. Using psychoanalytic terminology applied to the social realm may carry with it its own problems, but these are enhanced when we use the language of pathology, whereby a social diagnosis can easily serve to disenfranchise those whose plight it means to highlight. Psychological portrayals of nations in states of occupation or colonisation have been especially exposed to this terminology, perhaps not surprisingly, considering their inherent injustice and well-documented social and political consequences. However, considering the widespread use of psychoanalysis outside clinical settings, the question of

symbolic identifications—'deficiency' of the paternal function, 'foreclosure of the name-of-the-father,' perpetual questioning of the symbolic Law and pact, confusion of lineage and general competition of generations, battle of the sexes, and loss of family landmarks. . . . Let us not be fooled by Lacan's invocation of the symbolic Law: What he described as an a priori law of human desire is nothing but a convenient hypothesis of the 'elementary structures of kinship' in Lévi-Strauss's sense, and it cannot be applied to modern societies, where it simply does not apply *as a law*. . . . How is it possible to separate good from bad oedipal identification if the law that guarantees that difference is slowly being eroded in our societies?" (282).

whether one is justified in using its tools to examine the social world has perhaps become redundant.

Instead, one may do well to follow Stephen Frosh's advice to use the analytical tools of psychoanalysis reflexively. Not only should one avoid treating it as a kind of oracle, which could provide insights other approaches might fail to give. One should also remain aware that many of its theories are products of a specific time (and individual), and should be treated with a certain awareness of this context. Frosh calls for psychoanalysis "[...]to step back from its own normativeness, its own conformist tendencies, and ask how it can be constantly renewed" (Frosh, 2010:224). This does not imply that the *clinical* concept of melancholia for example cannot be used in a *societal* context – indeed it has been applied very fruitfully to the study of post-transitional and post-colonial regimes, as detailed below – but that beyond certain structural similarities with the initial concept, it can acquire a different set of meanings and consequences outside the clinic; meanings that might call for a different type of 'intervention'.

Melancholia - as a pathological form of identification - has been diagnosed in societies that have struggled to acknowledge or work through the loss of a national ideal, beginning with the Mitscherlichs' famous study of Germans' *Inability to Mourn* (1975), which detailed how the apolitical stance and focus on economic success of most post-war Western Germans was actually symptomatic of an underlying melancholic identification with, and refusal to mourn, the loss of the ideal image of Germany and Germans propagated under National Socialism. Paul Gilroy (2005) detected similar workings in the British psyche: the British continual celebration of moments of 'glory' such as its role during WWII in fact indicates a harmful obsession, or rather, regressive identification with its former omnipotence as colonial masters over large parts of the world.

Homi Bhabha, like many others, turns to the writings of Frantz Fanon, in order to examine the dynamics of identification in the colonial subject. He concludes that, because to exist in relation to others (which is the only way to exist) means to identify, *colonial identification* is always "caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a place of splitting" (Bhabha, 2004:63) – the fantasy of assuming the place of the colonial master co-occurs with one of retaining one's place and one's anger. At the same time, the image

of the colonial subject has become distorted by the coloniser's gaze, so that identification becomes "the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes." (ibid:64). The colonial subject finds itself doubly alienated, in search of deliverance from identifications that are injurious to both the oppressed and the oppressor. These identifications, that are at best ambivalent, at their worst "compulsive" (p.86) or even "paranoiac" (p.88), become symbols of a dislocation, which is both social and psychic. Identification in a colonial context is thus seen as a "pathological condition produced by the colonial relation" (Fuss, 1994:29).

One of the questions that follow from a reading of Fanon is then how subjects can liberate themselves from these problematic identifications, if one sees, as he does, identification as the incorporation of an image that originates in the fantasy of the colonial oppressor and that serves to enslave its subjects. One strategy which Fanon himself refers to is a *refusal to identify*. In order to illustrate this, Diane Fuss cites the example given by Fanon of an Algerian woman walking around unveiled, thus 'imitating' the style of the French occupiers. Fanon is at pains to stress that this instance of imitation is not simultaneously also one of identification. Imitation here is purely instrumental, as it allows the women to carry weapons undetected. However, it remains difficult to determine how one can be sure whether an identification has not in fact taken place regardless, especially in light of Butler's comments on disidentification as an alternative form of identification.

Nevertheless, the emancipatory and political potential of disidentificatory practises is also hailed by Muñoz, who claims that it "permits the subject of ideology to contest the interpellations of the dominant ideology" (Muñoz, 1999:168) – in the cases mentioned by him through carving out an alternative space for queer, "anti-identitarian" (ibid: 177) identities. At the same time he aims to rehabilitate the role of melancholia in marginalised communities (note the difference between this type of community and the national melancholia referred to by Mitscherlich and later Gilroy), for whom it can become a productive 'structure of feeling' reminding them of what was and could once more be.

Table 1: Types of identification

Theoretician	Types of Identification	Characteristics	Applications / Elaborations
Freud	First	“object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other” : wanting to have & to be.	
	Second (<i>Regressive</i>)	“in a regressive way it becomes a substitute for a libidinal object-tie”: wanting to be so as to have; Melancholia; Identification with leader	Ahmed: Identification as a form of love Butler: “Melancholy Gender”, Gilroy: “Postcolonial Melancholia”
	Third (<i>Hysterical</i>)	“one ego has perceived a significant analogy with another upon one point” Identification between group members	
Lacan	Imaginary (<i>Primary</i>)	Identification with image, establishing ego, leads to formation of ideal ego , involves feelings of rivalry & alienation	Žižek: ‘identification with image in which we appear to ourselves’
	Symbolic (<i>Secondary</i>)	Identification with signifier/traits, with the Name-of-the-Father; represents accession into symbolic order, leads to formation of ego ideal Identification with look of the Other	Žižek: ‘identification with place <i>from where</i> we are being observed’; Ideological identification; subject requires <u>fantasy</u> in order to fully assume mandate.

Conclusion

In *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic* (2010), Stephen Frosh summarises the main aspects of identification - the emphasis being on its processual nature – and concludes that:

- i) identity is not an achievement, but an act which, in order to come into being,
- ii) requires constant re-enactment and performative elaboration, as well as
- iii) recognition by others and an Other, and, importantly,
- iv) the subject's affective investment.

The ego is formed through identification, meaning the internalisation of lost objects, and their incorporation into the subject's fantasy. Identity formation thus becomes “something founded on the fantasised relationship with real objects in the interpersonal or intersubjective world” (Frosh, 2010:109). One way of treating identifications which take place in adulthood is to regard them as answers to the question of what makes one's life liveable. In order to do so, these identifications need to retain a link to one's ideal ego and ego ideals. At the same time, they enable one to hold on *psychically* to what may already be lost in material reality, or what one has never been able to possess due to the foreclosure of certain desires. If we assume that adult identifications include those with political and national ideals, then the nature of these identifications reflects not only a subject's personal history of prior identifications made in childhood, they also reveal something of history itself.

In a social context which is undergoing dramatic transformations, or which is characterised by skewed power relations, a prevalent identificatory pattern can potentially help one gain a better understanding of the context itself. A strongly melancholic tinge to national identification can therefore mean that ideals, which have perhaps been publicly disavowed, continue a ‘subterranean’ existence allowing them to keep exerting their influence. Alternatively, an excessively cynical attitude to one's nation and national signifiers may point to a type of disidentification (which, if we recall, is also a type of identification), as a straightforward identification would prove to injurious to the psyche. At the same time, one should not neglect the emancipatory potential of these forms of identification, as they may eventually result in new practises, or lead to the demand for new structures.

One strategy enabling one to utilise theories of identification – while heeding the warning not to apply psychoanalytic ideas opportunistically – is to start with a form of social ‘diagnosis’: what are a nation’s societal structures and forms of sociality, what are its manifest problems, and who suffers (or, despite apparent injustices, claims not to suffer)? Only then can one turn to psychoanalytic ideas and rephrase the above questions in terms of symptoms, using clinical notions to understand what these could represent. If ideas from the clinical domain can give one clues about what could be going on, then one should be able to return to one’s initial analysis with a better comprehension of the underlying motivations of – or affective investment in – certain social movements and practices.

Chapter III: Reading formations of national identification: a psychosocial approach

Against the view of someone who might argue that identification with a form of discourse is labile, tenuous and weak, I would urge that it is in fact immensely strong since it is cognate with those primordial movements, constitutive for the species, in which the subject strives to win a place for itself within language and so become a speaking subject. (Easthope, 1999:18)

One of the thesis' central challenges is the location of psychic operations, such as that of identification with the nation, in discourse. This entails a movement from what is observable in language to a conjecture of what these recurrent linguistic patterns might indicate in terms of psychic operations in the subject. The analytical move from discourse to psyche is also one of the central methodological preoccupations of psychosocial studies, so that the current chapter represents an attempt to present an overview not only of the methodological procedure of this particular study, but also a survey of relevant of strategies to examine human subjectivity as it is "produced and reproduced in the text, as embodied and 'invested' discourse" (Savile Young & Frosh, 2010: 518). The chapter follows a dual structure: after describing how to distinguish a psychosocial approach from other forms of textual analysis, the second part features an exposition of the thesis' empirical process, and which methodological steps this entails. Anthony Easthope's quote serves as a good transition from the previous chapter, with its focus on the theoretical underpinnings of the study, to the current one, which seeks to lay out the rationale for the analytical strategy and methods of data collection. This then paves the way for the subsequent empirical chapters. In comparison with other forms of qualitative analysis, there has been relatively little empirical work that seeks to identify moments of identification in discourse using a psychosocial methodology. This thesis seeks to fill this lacuna by applying this type of analysis across different forms of textual discourse, such as interviews, surveys and media representations.

The thesis' introductory chapter provided information on the discursive conditions that form the background to the subsequent empirical chapters. Without awareness of, and sensitivity to the sociohistoric developments of which subjects have been a part, social research methodology becomes ineffectual, if not meaningless. Ideally, such knowledge enables social researchers to gain a more holistic understanding of their participants. In the case of post-Soviet Russia, and as indicated in the introduction, it is crucial to acknowledge that this context is marked by profound uncertainty and sense of dislocation that transcends the characteristic facets of (post)modernity. A psychosocial

analysis such as it is proposed here entails paying attention to such societal shifts and disjunctures, and to examine how they are reflected in discursive patterns and formations. One approach allowing the social researcher to trace such changes is to look at discourse in the form of spontaneous utterances, as well as those of a more formal, institutionalised nature. In fact, it could be argued that as an examination of subjects' discourse(s) provides insight into prevalent discourses and relations of power in a given society, they can also convey a realistic picture of how transitions from one order to another affect the individual:

At times, changes in discursive fields and changes of 'verbally constituted consciousness' might be more telling, so to speak, than political changes themselves. In other words, socio-political changes can be approached through the transformation of 'differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions' that a 'discoursing subject' assumes within the discursive field under construction. (Oushakine, 2000: 997)

Most forms of critical discourse analysis offer ways of examining the effect of power relations and their transformation on "modes of representation" (Taylor, Yates, & Open University., 2001: 360), so as to (in its more Critical form) "highlight the way that speakers both exploit and are exploited by existing discursive formations" (Edley, 2001:223). The task of the scholar employing the tools of discourse analysis is thus to focus on a) the historic conditions of possibility that led to emergence of a specific discourse or set of discourses, and/or b) the meanings imparted to the objects through these 'orders of discourse'.

However, whereas a purely discursive reading might seek to identify subject positions assumed in an instance of discourse, what the taking up of these positions enables the subject to do, and how they might reflect wider societal discourses, a psychoanalytic reading would attempt to ask why it is that the subject displays such an attachment (or aversion) to these positions, and to identify the modes and vicissitudes of such attachments. One of the project's outcomes is therefore the compilation of modes of identification encountered across different types of discourse.

Methodological strategy and injunctions

Discourse analyses

Detecting the workings of discourse in contemporary social and political formations presents a challenge when we remind ourselves that one can only speak of discourse from *within* discourse. Different schools of thought within the tradition disagree over whether anything can be located outside the realm of the discursively constructed (e.g. Billig, 1997, 2006; Potter et al, 1990). However, whenever we take recourse to words in order to talk or write about things which themselves may have an existence independent of language, we re-enter discourse, as pointed out in the following much-cited words by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field ([Laclau & Mouffe, 2001](#):108).

The conflict between the more extreme strands of discourse theory and those in favour of a stance of 'critical realism' ([Bhaskar, 1989](#)) has led to different research trajectories, but this divergence of opinions is of less consequence for those interested in investigating how certain objects and practices which appear as self-evident and natural are in fact the products of specific discourses, and how these discourses can serve to support or resist relations of power. According to the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis as set out by Norman Fairclough (1992), rather than immediately approaching research with a series of pre-defined research questions, the discourse analysis should be commenced by identifying a social problem which has a semiotic aspect. The discursive aspect and the power relations it re-produces can find their expression in both symbolic and social practices and networks, and are often easier to locate in societies, or parts of society, undergoing social change.

One example of a CDA-inspired analysis of *the discursive construction of national identities* is Ruth Wodak et al's study of a variety of instances of discourse by and about Austrians in the late 1990s (Wodak et al, 1999). Like the present study, it views nations as 'imagined political communities' (Anderson, 2006:15) that require constant re-production and re-affirmation in order to produce identities. The 'raw material' of nation building is a shared or sharable repertoire of cultural and historical objects and artefacts which can be re-

counted, re-assembled and re-interpreted at will. The very constructedness of national identities, and the transformations they undergo, make them almost ideal objects of study for discourse theory: “national identity is the form, *par excellence*, of identification that is characterised by the drawing of rigid, if complex, boundaries to distinguish the collective self and its the other” ([Howarth, Norval, & Stavrakakis, 2000](#): 226).

However, one major point of divergence between Wodak et al’s approach to discourse and a more psychoanalytically inflected method is in the way subjects are perceived to *assume* discourses of the nation. The account given by the former aligns with the majority of national identity research, which treats it as “as internalized structuring impetus which more or less strongly influences social practices” (Wodak et al, 1999: 156). This de-problematizes the process of (national) identification to a certain extent by removing the necessity to look closer into what is required in order to *internalise* a discourse, and which elements are privileged or neglected in the process. In different, but related terms:

The problem with discourse analysis is that it fails to consider the crucial non-discursive element upon whose disavowal every discursive/ideological practice relies. ([Vighi & Feldner, 2010](#):39)

The present study shares with CDA a concern with the social world, a sensitivity to historical processes and an interest in investigating the signifiers and narratives that structure viable subject positions. Crucially, however, my analysis seeks to go beyond the mere ordering or categorization of discourse, and towards an elaboration of discursive strategies employed, that is, the logic operating in each of the discourses.

Discourse and the subject

At first glance, discourse analysis, with its insistence on the agency of discourse and the way it provides and shapes subject positions, seems to leave out the question of subjectivity altogether³². When using the tools and techniques of discourse analysis to study individual utterances, the role of the individual therefore at times seems to be reduced to that of a sounding board for available subject positions in discourse, that is, the notion that the subject is spoken by discourse. However, since the 1980s there has been a renewed interest in the subject. Social psychologists such as Wendy Hollway ([Hollway, 1989](#)) have

³² Bar a few exceptions such as Henriques et al. (1984).

used discourse analysis to investigate the production of subjectivity in gender and family relations, and have found that:

[...] the positions which are available in discourses do not determine people's subjectivity in any unitary way. Whilst gender-differentiated positions do overdetermine the meanings and practices and values which construct an individual's identity, they do not account for the complex, multiple and contradictory meanings which affect and are affected by people's practices. (Hollway, 1989: 282)

She demonstrates that the conversations with her research participants are more than just a "mechanical circulation of discourses" (ibid.), and that the forms of subjectivity assumed in the interviews represent an attempt to protect themselves "from the vulnerability of desire for the other" (p.283). This in fact links to a more psychoanalytic approach to discourse, which offers "a framework for considering how we may be invested in a particular discourse" ([Branney, 2008:576](#)).

In his 1999 book on *Freudian Repression*, Michael Billig argues that the two forms of repression – in, or because of language, cannot be separated. Billig treats repression as an activity accomplished in language, rather than an unconscious mechanism over which the subject has no control and is not even aware of. In his account, the act of repression is consciously performed by the person, not by the ego or any other mental structure: as soon as we speak, we repress – not all things can be said to everyone at all times, for different reasons. Methodologically, this for instance means paying attention to *how* things are said, but also when they are not addressed, avoided, or when participants abruptly change the subject. When analysing interviews, it is helpful to treat them as 'situated interactions' along the lines of what he describes in his analysis of the repressed elements present in any social interaction. This means factoring in the interviewer's presence, as well as coming to recognise the interview event as artificial, that is, as a conversation, usually between quasi-strangers, that would not have taken place without the researcher's instigation.

Billig equates his concern with mental functioning to that of cognitive scientists. Together with other scholars in discursive psychology such as Potter and Margaret Wetherell, and inspired by predecessors such as John Austin and Mikhail Bakhtin, he is concerned with talk as a *social action*, thus at least partially rejecting the notion that thinking is an internal process, making it unobservable by others. In fact, following this line of thinking, one

should not only be more optimistic about the use of language as a viable route to arrive at the subject – here, the subject *is* language. Billig is keen to point that emotions are not unconscious, wordless inner states of arousal which require translation into words – he presents a view in which emotions are a form of activity that takes place in language and conversation.

At the same time, this type of analysis' focus on language, and the insistence that we are confined to its parameters, at times limits its theoretical reach, especially in situations where there might be a strong affective component at play, as criticised by Stephen Frosh in his discussion of Michael Billig's work:

I think that the over-strong discursive move participates in a rationalist fallacy that itself 'flattens out' situations of great emotional complexity, of intense feeling. ([Frosh, 2002](#):189)

This means that the psychic operations that make up the focus of this study – as they are not merely the product of social and linguistic conventions, which serve to enable the smooth running of everyday interactions - require different analytical tools, like those of a more psychosocial approach.

Psychosocial methodologies: deadlocks and impasses.

It may be unusual to begin a section advocating a methodological approach with a detailed explication of the deadlocks and impossibilities with which the psychosocial researcher is confronted. However, one of the distinguishing features of the relatively new area of psychosocial studies is its acknowledgement of the challenges present when examining the forces that have an impact on subjectivity. Rather than utilising language as data, confident in its ability to contain all the information one needs about subjects, "[...] psychoanalysis shows very clearly that there is a point where discourse fails, where language is characterised by its insufficiency rather than its expressive capacity, where what is known in and by a person lies quite simply outside of symbolisation" (Frosh, 2002: 172). Stephen Frosh further qualifies the area's relationship with language:

The reason that some things cannot be said is not that they are mystical and the language in which to express them is absent, but rather that language itself produces gaps and difference, that as we speak and therefore inhabit the Symbolic, we engage in a process of exclusion (Frosh 2007: 641).

However, the conclusion to be drawn here is not resignation, or mistrust in all that is produced in and via language. In fact, Laclau is adamant that affect resides *within* discourse: “Freud already knew it: the social link is a libidinal link” (2004: 326). In Mladen Dolar’s interpretation, there is “nothing that would call for casting away language as insufficient” (Dolar, 1993: 95). Language both provides the means with which to locate ourselves, and to be heard from that very location, and it creates a loss, as with one’s entry into language one also becomes confined within its limits. In (even) more Lacanian terms: “What is beyond language is the result of language itself. Only in and through language is there an unspeakable – that remainder produced as the fallout of the Symbolic order and the Real.” (ibid.)

If one must assume that it is impossible to truly speak of one’s identification with the nation, thus reaching an inevitable encounter with the frustrations of reaching an adequate representation, an answer is perhaps to be found in the linguistic gaps and lacunae, that is, the rhetorical and discursive strategies employed to overcome these impossibilities. From a methodological angle, this raises the question of whether this is to do with gaps in language as implied in the quote above, or whether there is something that escapes representability. If this is true, then those interested in discourses of identification must look for strategies of evasion or compensation that emerge because of it. Indeed, one of the major challenges facing the researcher interested in investigating processes of identification is the question of how to access these if the mechanisms at work are unconscious. Additionally, many of the facets underlying a current subject position may in fact be unpalatable to the subject. Identification with, for example, a certain moment in a nation’s history may be an instance of melancholic identification with the country’s ‘lost’ status (see Paul Gilroy’s 2005 *Postcolonial Melancholia*).

Here the argumentation seems to have reached a theoretical impasse: discourse analysis and similarly, discursive psychology in the tradition of Wetherell and Potter, claim that psychological states can and should be observed in language and practices. Psychoanalysts, on the other hand, emphasise the importance of what is unspoken by, and possibly inaccessible to subjects themselves, making these two approaches seemingly irreconcilable. While Karen Malone (2000) concludes that the fundamental optimism in psychoanalysis’ ability to at least potentially bridge the gap between ‘the formation of subjectivity’ and the ‘social dimension’ had not as yet been realised, she recommends that this should not

discourage the researcher. She adds, perhaps rather hesitatingly, that its ideas have distinct value, as “it adds another dimension, a layering, that specifies the efficacy of the social without reducing subjectivity” (Malone, 2000: 81).

Georgina Born (1998) is yet more optimistic. As an anthropologist employing Kleinian concepts, she is confident of the value of transferring these from the study of group dynamics to an investigation of “defence mechanisms characteristic of the discourse or cultural system under study” (Born, 1998: 374). She further states that Kleinian ideas are in fact more appropriate for the analysis of sociocultural systems than those of Freud or Lacan, as “in contrast to the normative developmental narratives of Freudian and Lacanian perspectives, Klein offers the concept of “positions.”” (ibid.) However, not only is she relying on somewhat obsolete representations of these psychoanalytic schools of thought, it is surely also the case that the tendency to see processes “such as projection and introjection, splitting and fragmentation” (Born, 1998: 373) as occurring routinely within institutions can be similarly reductive.

Lacanian discourse analysis

A Lacanian approach to discourse analysis is in fact gaining currency in social research, as it seeks to incorporate the analytical insights of discourse analysis with the “sophistication of its [i.e. psychoanalysis, MB] ideas about emotional investment and fantasy” ([Frosh & Baraitser, 2008](#): 351). In fact, a Lacanian perspective is perhaps singularly well positioned for such an undertaking, as for Lacan the unconscious is to be located not *within* the individual, but as a feature of language, “that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject’s disposal in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse” (Lacan, 2002, quoted in Parker, 2005).

This perspective aims to show that, while there may be a limited choice in the positions that subjects can assume within discourse (and, in more Lacanian terms: as the symbolic order predates the individual), how and why they invest in certain subject positions can also be fruitfully explored using psychoanalytic concepts:

Our route through this mire is to argue that in the accounts individuals give of their lived experiences, one can see at work both the powerful effects of social discourses and the agentic struggles of particular subjects as they locate themselves in relation to these discourses -and that the unconscious is both generated by this struggle, and generative of its consequences (Frosh et al, 2003: 7).

A first step when looking at texts, be they public and/or institutionalised, or in the form of private narratives, is to read for existing discourses, and the position(s) the text or narrative takes in relation to them. Parker (2005, 2010) provides a guide for ‘negotiating a Text with Lacan’ (2010), by advising the analyst to examine the *formal qualities of the text*, the *anchoring of representation*, to look at the different registers of communication and instances of *agency and determination*, the *role of knowledge*, *positions in language*, *deadlocks of perspective* and, importantly, to be wary of one’s own *interpretation of textual material*.

The three registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real permeate discourse and the way the subject is positioned within it: “whenever we deal with discourse we are necessarily dealing with the intertwining of imaginary, symbolic and real elements” (Neill, 2013:6). In discourse, the Imaginary can be described as the dimension of ego-substantiating interactions between subjects (e.g. the interviewer and the interviewee, or the author and the public) and in this capacity it relies on the narcissistic aspects of identification, as well as its aggressive and rivalrous tendencies, as explained in greater detail in chapter II. The researcher needs to acknowledge that in any interpretation of what is communicated, meaning is established retroactively, and is likely to contain imaginary elements.

The symbolic is referred to by Parker as the “*unconscious of the text*” (2010, author’s italics) – it is what is not thematised, does not appear to require thematisation, yet functions to structure the text and our understanding of it. It is in this dimension that one needs to pay close attention to any ‘holes’ or ‘gaps’ in speech as an indication of something that cannot be said, that is repressed. The real in the text is the underlying ‘centre of gravity’, the thing that drives the exchange or that serves to “provide cohesion to make sense of the discourse in play” (Neill, 2013:8), while at the same resisting adequate representation or verbalisation by the subject(s).

In order to benefit from the insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the discourse analyst should not conclude his or her labours at the stage of having identified the three registers in operation within the text. Used in this way, Lacan-inflected discourse analysis becomes little more than a method for ordering data, or at most “a tool to open up a text” (Parker, 2010). According to Žižek, it is the categories of fantasy and *jouissance* that make up the crucial component which has been left out of existing discourse analyses: the aspect of

enjoyment, of the subject's attachment to certain signifiers, despite their outwardly 'irrational' nature ([Žižek, 1989](#)). These concepts may be offering clues to what constitutes subjects' attachment to certain discourses, in other words, what makes up the 'drive behind identification acts' (Stravarakakis, 2007: 166). But while work dedicated to detecting the workings of fantasy in ideology, and of ideology in fantasy, may have become more prevalent since the publication of Žižek's *Sublime Object of Ideology* (e.g. [Glynos, 2001, 2008](#); [Stavarakakis, 1999, 2007](#)), accessing the workings of fantasy and desire in private discourse represents perhaps the most challenging task for the researcher. Significant methodological challenges thus remain when one tries to implement the above recommendations to empirical data.

Finally, the privileging of language in Lacanian Discourse Analysis is coupled with what at times reads like a celebration of incomprehension. Lacan's clinical recommendation not to assume the place of the 'subject that is supposed to know' (*le sujet-supposé-savoir*)³³, while ethically sound as a way of refraining from colonising the text with the researcher's investments, makes viable forms of investigation of subjects' accounts even more elusive. After all, how can one make this 'refusal of understanding' actionable, that is, how can one transform an impossibility into a methodological injunction?

Return to Freud

Along with interest in the Lacanian approach (2008a, 2008b, 2008c), Derek Hook has in recent years increasingly called for a reconsideration of Freud's work for the purpose of investigating processes of group identification, as "Freudian group psychology pin-points those trajectories of affect – discourses and affects of identification here being intractably interwoven – that prove indispensable in constituting a group" (2014). However, he is similarly wary of researchers confining themselves solely to the textual, to that which is legible, as a way of gaining a closer understanding of these "trajectories of affect" and warns explicitly against simply mapping psychic formations onto discourse, that is, against "the utilization of models of psychical functioning as 'reading tools' that supply motifs to be identified within the contents of a given discourse" (ibid.) In order to examine how "lines of identification and desire" intersect in discourse, Hook suggests approaching the analysis of discourse with a number of questions which operate as structuring principles for the text and enable the researcher to extract facets which might form the building blocks of

³³ "I would go as far as to say that it is on the basis of a kind of refusal of understanding that we push open the door to analytic understanding" (Lacan, 1953-54: 73).

a careful psychosocial reading. These questions include enquiries into what it is the community most values or yearns for, as a way of locating narcissistic points of identification and given ideal-ego values, as well as the community's 'lost objects'. Others focus on the preferred mode of enjoyment of group, and, crucially, seek to identify its key symbols and points of historical identification. In other words, it attempts to pinpoint its ego-ideal values and prevailing master-signifiers.

Claudia Lapping advocates a similarly non-dogmatic approach to textual analysis. In her book on the pitfalls and possibilities of using *Psychoanalysis in Social Research* (2011) she suggests that openness is essential to psychosocial forms of analysis:

I am arguing *against* the reification of psychoanalytic concepts. Psychoanalytic concepts are not unitary objects that exist outside a particular analysis. They are constituted in the process of analysis, in the discontinuous elements of discourse; they are signifying elements that are only temporarily ordered or fixed within a particular social and historical context (Lapping, 2011:6).

Lapping engages with the question of whether one can read discourses in the manner reserved for the interpretation of dreams, as this would in principle represent the most fundamentally psychoanalytic of all forms of textual analysis. Indeed, some of the 'tools' provided by Freud, such as the distinction between manifest and latent content, notions of condensation and displacement, and the idea of overdetermination have become popularised to a degree that they have entered mainstream discourse (Parker, 1997). The concept of overdetermination has also re-emerged in discourse analysis, for example in Laclau and Mouffe's employment of the idea of 'nodal points' tying the field of discursivity together (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

However, while she is attuned to the needs of scholars engaging in empirical social research, Lapping is simultaneously wary of the spectre of misinterpretation by those who have come to treat psychoanalysis as something of a *Weltanschauung*, thereby ignoring the problems of integrating psychoanalytic ideas outside the clinic (Frosh, 2011). Potential temptations for the social researcher are those of overprivileging one's own research agenda so as to become blind to the actual discourses at hand, or to apply psychoanalytic ideas haphazardly in order to give an illusion of psychological depth. Finally, Lapping gives room to the divergent opinions surrounding the debate of whether

one can ever get to the truth of another subject, and if so, by how much, for instance by asking whether affect can be transmitted without distortion, “since the condensation of meanings through symbolic associations has a simultaneous effect of displacing or covering over affect?” (Lapping, 2011: 62).

This is of special relevance to social researchers who may find themselves trying to minimise the degree of ‘static’ in research encounters, while inadvertently becoming its source. It is important to remember that subjects do not represent puzzles to be solved by the ‘right’ analyst. Engaging in psychosocial forms of methodology means giving up on the fantasy of mastery. Indeed, not all instances of say, repetition, may even benefit from the introduction of psychoanalytic concepts, as they may not always point to strong underlying attachments.

Methodological lessons

Moving on to the consideration of methodological injunctions for the analysis of discourse, Frosh and Lapping both suggest a multi-stage approach to the text. In one of the studies commended by Lapping, the first analytical stage operates on the level of discourse, focusing on “the discursive texture of reiterated categories” (Lapping, 2011: 92). At this stage, there is not yet any accounting for why there is attachment to certain positions within discourse, as this quasi-Foucaultian stance does not offer the explanatory tools which would reveal “why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others” (Hall, 1996: 10). Following this first ordering move, the second stage opens itself up to the careful introduction of psychosocial ideas, and is thus potentially more equipped to “capture the complexity of desire, transference and the compulsion to repeat (Lapping, 2011:93). However, while certain inferences may be made and patterns be given some hesitant interpretation, even a multi-stage process does not allow for analytical certainty. Through a psychosocial reading, the fact of affective investment can be established, but its meaning or definite origin most likely remain opaque. In other words, “we can trace the discursive instantiations of reiterated desire, but we cannot, perhaps, gain access to desire itself” (Lapping, 2011: 95).

Frosh similarly posits that psychoanalysis is useful for “outlining patterns of desire in which subjects become stuck” (Frosh, 2010: 186) and can thus perhaps explain attachment to certain subject positions. The analytical procedure of ‘concentric

reflexivity' he discusses at length in his 2010 article with Lisa Savile Young is similarly consistent of two stages or 'circles'. The first circle:

[...] is concerned with discursive positions resisted and taken up in talk.[...] In Lacanian terms, master signifiers are identified in the text – recurring metaphors or discourses that define and limit what can and cannot be said, making certain subject positions possible while denying others (Savile Young & Frosh, 2010: 518).

In procedural terms, this stage analyses the text's structure, paying attention both to the text's internal logic, and the way it reflects or "ventriloquates" (Frosh, 2007) broader cultural discourses. The second stage represents the "realm of the psychosocial" proper, as it "understands subjectivity, produced and reproduced in the text, as embodied and 'invested' discourse and it is here that psychoanalysis is drawn upon as part of the attempt to construct the text in a certain way" (ibid.). However, subjectivity itself is not a stable entity in the text. Rather it is located at the intersection of the two concentric circles, and its manifestation is a product both of "the subjectivity of the researched as well as the subjectivity of the researcher" (Savile Young & Frosh, 2010: 519). A psychosocial reading is thus able to discern specific textual dynamics, and to connect such observations to the presence of affect, or the existence of certain nodal points or master signifiers which structure discourse. Specific instantiations of discourse may even share similarities with certain psychic operations, such as splitting and disavowal. While such readings are never final – psychosocial meaning can rarely be fixed in this manner – they may shed some insight both into the logic inherent in discourse, and the subject's investment in it.

Multi-method research

In order to investigate different registers of identification and discourse formation, texts for this project were gathered from four different discursive sites. One of the research outcomes is the identification of modes and vicissitudes of attachments to the nation encountered in discourse. In order to achieve this, the thesis examined two dimensions of discourse: its private, spontaneous instantiation in interviews and open-ended surveys, and its more deliberate, public form. This meant that these two types of discourse were also analysed with somewhat different focal points in mind, as will become apparent in the following sections.

Stages of data collection

- 1. 8 semi-structured interviews with Russians in London**
(Completed in December 2010, between 30 – 60 mins)
- 2. Collection of 34 online surveys using textual and image prompts**
(Commenced in March 2012. Completed in June 2012)
- 3. Case study I: Public responses to Pussy Riot's performance & subsequent arrest**
(Based on sources collected mainly between autumn 2012 and spring 2013)
- 4. Case study II: Public discourses of Putinism**
(Based on sources collected mainly between autumn 2012 and early 2014)

Part I: Interviews and surveys

The first semi-structured interviews for this project were conducted in November and December 2010. After 3 pilot interviews (with one Russian, one Polish and one Turkish participant), interviewees were recruited from several departments at the LSE and University College London through emails sent to departmental mailing lists, specifically addressing individuals born and raised in Russia. The 2 male and 6 female respondents were aged between 20 and 35 and mostly from the 2 Russian metropolises of Moscow and St Petersburg. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted in English. Participants had been given the opportunity to speak Russian, but had declined – several specifically to ‘practise their English’. However, on several occasions, and because my fluent knowledge of Russian had been established, interviewees would revert back to Russian for specific terms or phrases which they considered ‘untranslatable’ or for whose translation they sought my advice. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by myself.

Questions concerned the interviewees’ representations of Russia past and present, their ideas regarding the country’s problems and opportunities, as well as personal experiences that led to these views. Many of the interview questions tried to tap into a more imaginary realm (not in a strictly Lacanian sense yet), as a way of freeing the interview participants from the constraints of having to adhere to actuality, or a strict adherence to life, that is,

external events. In other words: introspection was strongly encouraged. A full topic guide can be found in the appendix, but a number of questions are listed here for purposes of illustration:

- How would you describe to someone who's never been to Russia, what it's like to live in it?
- What were your dreams or ambitions when you finished school?
- What is different between now and the time before 1992? What has actually changed?
- What does being Russian mean for you? Does it have a meaning?
- Any specific thoughts or feelings associated with the notion, say when you introduce yourself as Russian?
- Are these things you find yourself thinking about or discussing with others?

The transcribed interviews were subject to a preliminary analysis that aimed to draw out a number of initial discursive operations, which formed the basis for questions for the open-ended survey - the project's next stage.

Surveys

If we assume that *how* and *with whom or what* we identify is largely an unconscious process, then in order to gain access to mechanisms of identification, an ideal source of 'private' instantiations of discourse is one that interferes as little as possible with respondents' narratives. With most interview techniques, this is only partially realisable – the interviewer's presence, be it verbally or merely physically, is felt and can have a significant impact on the direction the interview takes. An alternative, and increasingly prevalent way of collecting qualitative data is through the Internet (Mann, 2000; Frueh, 2000). In fact, ever-increasing familiarity with the Internet's tools and platforms means that it has become a convenient way of data gathering, especially in order to reach respondents that are geographically remote, thus also managing the challenge of enabling a sense of being embedded in the participants' life world (*Lebenswelt*), without being embedded (at the time of research) in their life conditions (*Lebenslage*).

In March 2012, a brief online survey in Russian was placed online. Due to its links with the higher education sector, experience hosting social research projects, and general user-friendliness, I selected *Bristol Online Surveys*³⁴ to host the questionnaire. Respondents were recruited using snowball sampling via emails sent to a number of Russian friends, acquaintances and colleagues. The only condition for participation was that recipients had been born and raised in parts of the Soviet Union now forming Russia. In my email, I briefly described that my research was an investigation of Russians' relationship to, and interpretation of, the meanings of Russianness (see appendix for full text). The survey was closed on 30 June 2012, after 34 responses had been collected. Importantly, while the interviews were conducted in English and took place in various university settings in central London, the surveys were Russian-language and completed from different locations in Russia and, for a small number of cases, the European Union, the US and Canada. The potential implications of this are discussed in chapters IV and V.

In order to elicit more free-flowing narratives of national identification, after requesting standard sociodemographic information³⁵, the survey contained 5 open-ended questions:

- What does it take to become Russian?
Please answer in as much detail as possible
- Try to think of a moment or incident that made you feel especially Russian.
Please describe it in as much detail as possible.
- Can you list a number of items (objects, sensations) that are truly Russian?
Could you please explain why you have chosen them?
- Has the meaning of Russianness/of being Russian changed over time? If so, how and why?
- Please describe or provide the link to an image or picture which would convey a sense of Russia or Russianness. Please explain why you have chosen this image.

Additionally, following the work of Jacqueline Palmade on identification and work (2003), the survey made use of images on which respondents were asked to comment (see appendix). The survey's focus on images and visceral sensations aimed to discourage an adherence to everyday occurrences and overly 'realistic' thinking, in other words, it aimed to provide greater space for affect and imaginative play with speech and

³⁴ <http://www.survey.bris.ac.uk>

³⁵ See appendix for tables containing sociodemographic information for interviews and surveys.

image. Together with the questions, this sought to elicit responses that closer resemble a kind of free association.

Respondent selection: discourse-rich yet opinion-poor?

As will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters, the majority of respondents completed higher or even postgraduate education, with most hailing from one of the two cultural Russian capitals, St Petersburg and Moscow, or from other, nevertheless fairly cosmopolitan cities such as Kaliningrad³⁶. The chief reason behind this conspicuous pattern is the recruitment strategy, namely contacting respondents via London university departments and snowball sampling via friends and colleagues. The existing pool of respondents therefore consists almost exclusively of members of the *intelligentsia* or, in a more recent designation, the ‘creative class’, that is, member of a highly educated class who frequently subscribe to a cosmopolitan outlook, or even live a transnational existence. What could perhaps be seen as a limitation of my sample has in fact given the thesis a productive and necessary additional focus. Not only is Russia too vast and multifaceted a country to make its entire population a realistic subject within the confines of a single doctoral thesis, the intelligentsia also has a historic, and, perhaps more importantly, symbolic significance in Russia that is not easily matched by similar groups in other countries. This group was one of the driving forces behind the anti-government protests of 2011/2012, and has recently been under fire in its supposed role as ‘fifth column’, because of its critical stance during preceding the annexation of Crimea. Chapter I has pointed to the complex, even contradictory social and political position that this class has found itself in since the 1990s. The following chapters seek to investigate how this position is perhaps mirrored in an ambivalent relationship with Russianness.

Due to their methodological implications, two, superficially contradictory facets of the respondent selection are worthy of comment. The first characteristic of the demographic featured here, and which was hinted at above, is that they are highly cultured and self-reflexive (Etkind, 2011), often using literature both as a discursive reference point and as a means of abstraction from current national sensibilities to more metaphysical concerns. This mostly urban class takes an active interest in both internal and foreign public discourses about Russia, and participates in them actively – more so now that the Internet

³⁶ The city and surrounding region, in its state as an exclave geographically situated between Poland and Lithuania, present themselves more ‘European’ than other Russian cities

provides ever-never platforms through which to disseminate one's ideas and opinions. In the words of Ruth Halliday (2004), they are 'discourse rich'. A passage in which she introduces this concept is worth quoting at length here:

What is clear from this conceptualisation is that the potential self - and the potential for that self to be reflective - is limited by one's access to discursive formations. Thus while some academic selves might have access to theoretical, political, legal, journalistic, therapeutic, televisual and situated discourses, other selves may only be able to access the latter of these (and even then the televisual and situated discourses available to some are severely restricted). What emerges from this are selves that exist on a continuum. At one end are the 'discourse rich' - those with a high level of cultural and social capital, highly educated, with access to libraries, intellectual discussions with colleagues and friends, 'intelligent' television programmes, art and literary criticism and counselling and therapy (all discourses that are highly valued). At the other are the 'discourse poor' - the practically and vocationally educated (with access only to discourses that have little attributed value). (Halliday, 2004: 56)

Halliday applies this idea of varying levels of discursive availability depending on one social's location to refer to research participants in the UK, a country arguably more marked by class distinctions (though not inequality) than post-Soviet Russia. It reminds the social researcher that those with less social capital – already underrepresented – have fewer discursive means at their disposal, which serves to perpetuate and justify the initial underrepresentation. However, for those conducting research with members of the highest-educated class in Russia, this statement bodes well for the research, promising as it does rich, multi-layered responses from the participants. Yet upon further inspection the equation of cultural with social capital does not necessarily hold true: while “evidently, in post-Soviet society, “middle” (or any) class is often interpreted as a moral category and mark of character” (Chehonadskih, 2014: 206), the Russian intelligentsia has overall not been able to translate their intellectual credentials into financial stability or prestige at the level of the middle class. As a group, this has left them unmoored and, in part due to their inability to position themselves in the political matrix (Chehonadskih, 2014), politically inarticulate.

This resonates with observations made almost 20 years earlier by political scientist Ellen Carnaghan, who in 1996 analysed 4 large scale opinion surveys conducted in the Soviet and early post-Soviet period. The remarkable prevalence of 'I don't know's' in all of these surveys made her question whether Russians suffer from 'Alienation, Apathy, or

Ambivalence?'. While one may treat this type of answer as a refusal to comment or to engage with political opinion polls, in a more pessimistic reading:

[...]the spectre of large numbers of opinionless citizens -or, maybe worse, citizens, who have opinions but do not say what they are – haunts prospects for the establishments of a stable democracy in Russia (Carnaghan, 1996: 326).

Disregarding the accuracy of this prediction (indeed the consensus appears to be that stability has been achieved at the cost of democracy), for the researcher seeking to encourage an exploration and articulation of attachments to Russian society this implies that, discursively, many Russians – discourse 'rich' or 'poor' – lack the means to make sense of their role and location in contemporary Russia. The current study therefore aims to both a) investigate the signifiers they utilise in lieu of political attitudes and affiliations, and b) examine to what degree these attachments take on the quality of 'alienation, apathy, or ambivalence'.

Part II: Case studies of public discourses

As referred to above, the Internet has in recent years gained currency as a valid research tool. As an alternative to the large-scale opinion survey, online publications and the discussion forums linked to them can prove a valuable resource for those interested in "judgments, systems of value, and rhetorical devices " employed by Russians (Trubina, 2008: 1). Thanks to the influence of Lacanian psychoanalysis on the study of ideology (frequently inspired by Ernesto Laclau's turn to Lacan), there is a number of works from which this study takes inspiration in its analysis of public discourses (Daly, 1999; Glynos, 2001; Stavrakakis, 1999). In order to analytically dissect a text's discourse, recommendations include the suggestion to identify the 'nodal point' or Master Signifier – the notion around which the entirety of the text is organised, although this signifier itself remains unmentioned, as if requiring no further elaboration. As identifications are characterised by elements of contradiction and discontinuity, an insistence on their unity often leads to the identification of actors or movements threatening their stability, "those who are responsible for loss and immanent blockage as a way of supporting its fantasy of ultimate unity" (Daly, 1999:225). While this framing of identity in terms of antagonistic struggles might not be expressed openly in more liberal publications, cultural artifacts at the margins of official discourse, such as tabloid newspapers, can provide rich examples of such 'blame games'. The Lacanian concept of enjoyment is equally vital to the analysis of media discourse. For example, it has been successfully applied to

analyses of work practices (Glynos, 2008), racism (Hook, 2008b), the discourse of 'New Labour' (Daly, 1999) and nationalism (Žižek, 1993). Finally, as the production or authoring of a discourse implies a recipient or consumer, close attention needs to be paid to how the researcher's reading of the text always entails imaginary identifications.

The second approach vital to the thesis is the analysis of cultural representations and representational mechanisms in the tradition of cultural studies. Of special relevance here is Stuart Hall's contention that in order to approach questions of identity, one needs the concept of identification, as any identity configuration "[...] is grounded in fantasy, in projection and idealization" (Hall, 1996: 14). The language he uses is distinctly psychoanalytic, and Hall in fact seems to call for the recruitment of psychosocial ideas when he later states that what is missing is:

[...]a theory of what the mechanisms are by which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating, and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. (ibid.)

The positions Hall refers to for instance become visible in situations of a public indignation and outward rejection of a position, such as in the responses to Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' and subsequent arrest. Another example can be certain 'overdetermined' signifiers such as national leaders, as they can provide a way of getting to ego-ideals which form such a fundamental element of symbolic identification, that is "the collection of the cherished and respected societal ideals which mean more than the ego itself. This is the 'to live and die for' element underlying the affective substance of the mass which is, importantly, as much a question of values and ideas as of powerful affective investment" (Hook, 2014:7). With this in mind, Vladimir Putin offers himself as a particularly pertinent example.

For part 2 of its analysis, the thesis takes a two-pronged approach, resulting in two chapters. One element is the examination of *discourses of rejection and (dis)identification* as featured in the public responses to Pussy Riot in Russia (Chapter VI). In their policing of Russianness and the demarcation of features deemed undesirable as embodied by the women of Pussy Riot, these delineate, implicitly or explicitly, the ideal form (and perhaps even content) of a national vision. The strongly negative

reactions to the punk prayer in Russia, and the subsequent calls for punishment were one of the most remarkable public ‘outcries’ of the Putin period, and its public criticism quickly evolved beyond that of ‘mere’ hurt religious feelings. The majority of sources cited here are based on a Russian Google (*google.ru*) news alert with the keyword ‘Pussy Riot’, which was active between August 2012 and December 2012. Additionally, a number of sources that offered a sustained engagement with the group or the case up to March 2013 were considered. Online platforms and sources that appeared several times were: snob.ru, mk.ru (*Moskovskiy Komsomolets*), kp.ru (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*) and echo.msk.ru (*Ekho Moskvy*).

The second element of this analysis of public discourses of Russianness is one that examines *discourses that seek to elicit identification*, and by extension, *love* in the populace. The question motivating this part of the analysis was how an ostensibly strong figure (both in terms of access to power, and mechanisms of self-representation) such as Vladimir Putin attempts to elicit leader love (Chapter VII). The changing tactics utilised to achieve this goal enable an analysis of their interpretation of ‘what the Russian people want’. The majority of sources cited in Chapter VII are based on a Russian Google news alert with the keyword ‘Putin’ active between October 2012 and December 2013, plus a number of media artefacts (pictures and video clips) as well as other sources (English and Russian) that offered a sustained engagement with the Russian president’s persona or role from as early as 2004 to as late as January 2014.

Ethics

In the case of empirical research involving personal encounters, attention needs to be paid to the relational dynamics between research participant(s) and researcher, not only because a properly *psychosocial* form of analysis would not be complete without such considerations, but more importantly to remain sensitive to how research participation affects participants. Additionally, if questions require the disclosure of personal information such as is the case in most survey research, the correct handling of this data and protection of anonymity become paramount. In terms of such potential ethical concerns, no major issues were anticipated, and those that could have emerged were indeed restricted to the interviews and surveys. Interview participants signed a consent form (Appendix I). Survey participants had to signal their consent before submitting

their responses (Appendix J). Interviewees were offered the chance to use a pseudonym, and a number of them made use of this possibility by selecting an appropriate alias.

For additional protection, only first names were used in the analysis. Because the interview questions were only preoccupied with life events insofar as they formed the backdrop to the participants' responses, and instead mainly focused on questions pertaining to Russia and Russianness, no emotional distress was predicted or encountered. One respondent, while initially very enthusiastic about the research, rather unexpectedly expressed concerns about her anonymity being compromised, so upon her request I changed not only her name but also the details of her postgraduate degree here in the UK. The fact that I saw no grounds for concern in the responses she provided – in fact I only saw them as mildly critical of contemporary Russia and its politics in comparison with other contributions – may indicate how my researcher's perspective and interest in the extreme forms that an attachment to, or rejection of the nation can assume, can become blind to the lived reality and consequences of these positions. The surveys were completely anonymised and participants are cited here as, e.g. 'S2', 'S23'. Additional sociodemographic information about the participants can be found in the appendix (Appendices D and H).

In the case of the second part of the thesis' empirical element, that is, the analysis of public discourses, no ethical concerns were foreseen. All texts are available in the public domain via the Internet or print publications (see References), so issues of data protection were not applicable. However, the possibility of a later dissemination of research conducted for the thesis in the form of published papers and presentations was a further consideration, particularly inasmuch as it would represent the 'public' representation of respondents' views. In the present example, this entailed refraining from conducting a form of 'wild analysis' or remote diagnosis, which would lead to the identification of participants in the public debates as supposedly suffering from psychological disorders. In the analysis of texts, a reading needs to necessarily remain on the level of discourse, not that of individual psyches. This represents one example of the confluence of ethical and methodological considerations in psychosocial research.

Reflexivity and resistance

Reflecting on the process of collection and analysis of texts, one eventually encounters multiple layers of translation. These are difficulties which are inherent to any project

seeking to describe what is not easily represented in language, as “there exists a large variety of different psychological experiences of considerable emotional force which lie outside narrative – even outside of what can be spoken” (Frosh, 2010: 527). Here Frosh addresses the fact that certain affective experiences may not correspond to specific word-representations. Another act of translation takes place when researchers transfer texts and responses conveyed to them by participants and through other sources into the language of academia, which inevitably, and not only through the act of interpretation, entails a degree of transformation. Additionally, the texts utilised by the researcher have often undergone both transcription and translation from one language to another. However, rather than become resigned regarding the possibilities of social research to ever get to the ‘truth of the subject’, one should remain aware of the fact that asking subjects to put things into words, and then to further work with those words along certain research trajectories creates new, perhaps unexpected meanings.

An additional factor in the present project is the shift from English to Russian and vice versa, which is mirrored in the different locations in which the research took place, that is, in London in case of the interviews, and mostly in Russia for the survey element. It opens up the question of what happens when we use a language that we do not quite inhabit, which is especially true of those Russians interviewed who had only spent a relatively short time in the UK. It is possible that in such circumstances we become reliant on expressions that are not our own, that perhaps reflect a different kind of experience. Indeed, a certain ‘grasping for words’ is rather characteristic of interviews. In the current example, it at times led to a process of common negotiation over the correct or adequate expression, sometimes resulting in delight when we appeared to have arrived at the correct ‘version’. The interviewer needs to be aware that in so fragile and temporary an encounter as that of an interview, gaining an understanding of the fantasmatic content and logic underpinning certain expressions may not always be viable, at times for chiefly linguistic reasons.

Another element of the transitory interview situation is that respondents may *resist* revealing too much of themselves, both consciously and unconsciously. However, when discussing the analysis of texts, it may also be worthwhile to speak of the *researcher’s* resistance. In these specific circumstances, it means acknowledging that as a non-Russian I am writing about, and to some extent, speaking *for* Russia and Russians. This appears to increase the stakes: there is a real sense of responsibility, and linked to this, a fear of failure

to 'get it wrong', or to misrepresent participants' responses. At the same time, the awareness of there being no 'ultimate truth' when speaking of the social world means that this sense of responsibility could at times lead to a repeated backtracking and triple-checking of arguments. It became increasingly difficult to disentangle whether this hesitation was part of a natural awareness that one never quite knows enough, and that the (social) research process goes through a series of 'endings', or whether it was rather a fear of not knowing enough *because* of writing about Russia. Compared to experiences of writing about research conducted in East Germany, where a familiarity, even intimacy with its places led to a much greater confidence in the process of analysis and writing, this therefore proved to be a much more uncomfortable process.

Finally, and as alluded to in the introduction, one major motivation to write about Russia was to counter many of the existing, Russophobic or simply uninformed narratives of the nation which circulate in the West. These increasingly hark back to Cold War-era discourse, as relations with Russia appear to be deteriorating. Paradoxically, this desire to write a counter-narrative stems from a sense of greater understanding of contemporary Russia, and a wish for this to transpire in the current analysis.

Conclusion

This thesis takes a two-pronged approach to national identification by looking at public and private instantiations of discourse in a context which is marked by instability. The group of highly educated, urban Russians traditionally referred to as the intelligentsia forms the focus of much of the thesis, especially in its first part consisting of interviews and open-ended surveys. This group is 'discourse rich' but devoid of discursive means that would anchor them in Russian actuality by allowing them to make sense of it discursively. In its second part, the thesis consists of two case studies. The first investigates public discourses of rejection and (dis)identification in the responses to the arrest and trial against members of Pussy Riot, while the second analyses discourses seeking to elicit identification and (leader) love as manifest in the public persona of Vladimir Putin.

This chapter discussed how psychosocial studies are distinguished by a heightened awareness of the challenges of qualitative analysis. These increase in urgency when introducing concepts from psychoanalysis, whereby the researchers move beyond a naming and categorisation of discourse and, in its critical form, a focus on power relations. The psychosocial researcher seeks to locate the unconscious forces driving certain discourses into circulation, and to examine subjects' investment in them. This includes a

highlighting of the role of affect, an employment of concepts such as ‘nodal points’ or master signifiers, and a focus on processes such as splitting and disavowal. In order to resist the temptation of seeing the unconscious ubiquitously, it has been suggested that it is often advantageous to proceed in several analytical stages, progressing carefully from the discursive to the psychosocial realm. Psychosocial forms of analysis, even in their allegiance to different schools of psychoanalysis, are particularly aware of how they are implicated in the meanings created in academic research. Hence the ‘impasses’ referred to here should be seen as productive, rather than limiting, as they point to the possibilities as much as to the limits of what can reliably be detected in discourse.

Finally, this approach serves to remind the scholar that while qualitative research usually relies on the narratibility of experience, much of what has an impact on subjects’ lives may lie outside of this: “To say, as some do, that the self *must* be narrated, that only the narrated self can be intelligible and survive, is to say that we cannot survive with an unconscious” (Butler, 2005: 65). In fact, explanations that seem too linear or ordered and thus leave no room for alternative meanings should leave the reader suspicious. Instead, accounts that do justice to subjectivity need to relinquish fantasies of integration, and to instead see the self as multiple and over-determined: “There is always 'too much' or 'too little' - an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (Hall, 1996: 3).

Chapter IV: Natasha's Dance and the Drunkard in the Rain³⁷: a psychosocial approach to texts on Russianness.

The, and Tolstoy discusses, this girl, she was brought according to maybe French principles, she had British gouvernante and something like that, yeah, and the lifestyle of, em, nobility, of high society was absolutely European, Western European, but she danced, because it was something native. Actually, I will also dance, because it feels so, so, native, so dear, actually, to me (Katia).

The preceding chapters outlined the theoretical and methodological foundations of investigating identification with the nation in general, and with Russianness in particular, while the introductory chapter pointed to some of the obstacles and impasses to this process. The current chapter, along with the consecutive chapter featuring an analysis of mixed-media surveys, seeks to detect instances of identification with Russianness in discourse. The tentative nature of this aim is based both on the precarious and at times fleeting nature of identification, as well as the fragility of any identity at which one might arrive.

The interviews in this chapter were conducted with full awareness of the problems of self-representation, and of how the image we have of ourselves can never be adequately translated into language. Indeed, in some ways the research project originates in this blockage – it acknowledges both the conceptual and methodological impossibility of attaining a representative account of what underlies Russianness, but it nonetheless maintains a belief in the significance of results that will be attained en route to this elusive destination. For the current research project, which aims to locate moments of national identification in discourse, it is assumed that there are moments when and where the subject feels he or she coincides with the signifier: “Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us (Hall, 1996: 7)”. These ‘temporary attachments’ can be fleeting experiences, but they are of a recurrent nature. A discourse analysis therefore needs to delineate what marks these moments of seeming authenticity, and, conversely, determine when and why the gap between oneself and the signifier is at times felt most acutely. When recurring patterns emerge, this could suggest conducting this type of analysis can be a way of examining the role of fantasmatic identification. As already indicated in the chapter on

³⁷ *Natasha's Dance* is the title of Orlando Figes' 2002 'cultural history of Russia', as well as a prominent reference made by one of the interviewees. The subheading is inspired by Stephen Frosh and Lisa Savile Young's 2010 article.

methodology, while closer to a critical psychoanalytic reading (see Frosh, 2003, 2007, 2010), this chapter takes discourse analysis as its starting point. The discourses referred to here are discourses of the nation, which, while multifaceted, tend to rely on key markers or master signifiers to tie them together. What the present analysis shares with discourse analysis is an interest in pattern, rather than merely individual instantiations of Russianness. However, the mere fact that certain discourses feature in a subject's repertoire is not deemed sufficient, though it does provide insight into the pool of knowledge and sense-making that is available. In order to account for 'passionate attachments' or attempts to break free of them, a more psychoanalytic perspective has been adopted. In order to prevent the formation of a kind of totalizing discourse which would insist on accounting for textual patterns in terms of 'symptoms', rather than accepting its fragmented nature, this perspective is applied to provide depth and additional nuance. The aim is emphatically not to colonise the text with wild forms of analysis. In line with postmodern readings of a less stable symbolic framework, it is conceded that when patterns become apparent in the shapes and forms that 'Russianness' assumes, the mechanisms of taking up these positions may turn out to be highly individual.

Eric Santner provides an alternative reading of the case history of 19th – century Judge Schreber which posits that it is not merely to be understood as the study of a paranoid schizophrenic, but rather that the personal crisis which affected Daniel Schreber is to be seen as part of a greater crisis of modernity. As a consequence, community's "existence as a meaning-giving, symbolic whole can no longer—and perhaps never again—be experienced as fully trustworthy or of ultimate value"(ibid., p.145). However, a "cultivation of an ensemble of "perverse" practices, identifications, and fantasies" (Santner, 1996: 145) can allow subjects to find their way back into a context of "basic human solidarity" (ibid.). For this study, a 'private Russia' can for instance entail an idealised version of the country as a kind of imaginary retreat or 'sanctuary of meaning' (Wilson, 2005) as one way of sustaining nostalgic practices. As explained in more detail in the introductory chapter, Oushakine (2000) describes post-soviet Russian subjectivities in terms of their inability to properly assume such identificatory positions in the present, which he relates to fundamental disturbances in the discursive field. To him, contemporary Russia does not offer the individual any subject positions that would adequately represent 'post-soviet man/woman', and Russians are thus forced to rely on

past signifiers, which remain ever-present if not in content – a content which has become historically redundant - then in form. In the work of both such theorists then, a psychosocial approach is adopted whereby psychoanalytic notions provide a way of reading the social through the insignia of subjective psychic life.

Aims of the chapter

The analysis presented here represents an attempt to implement some of the ideas explicated in Chapter II. The discursive operations identified in the analysis as ways that subjects have found to position themselves vis-à-vis Russia take their cue from the psychoanalytically informed accounts of identification by Butler (1997), Ahmed (2004) and Stavrakakis (2007), among others. Unlike their more theory-focused work, however, the present analysis attempts to apply their contributions to my own empirical data, thus simultaneously examining how to translate these into methodological prescriptions. One of the chapter's overarching concerns is reflected in Avitar Brah's question:

How do the 'symbolic order' and the social order articulate in the formation of the subject? In other words, how is the link between social and psychic reality to be theorized? (Brah, 1992:142)

More specifically, it seeks to investigate how this link between 'social and psychic reality' finds its articulation in discourse. Is it possible to detect 'passionate attachments' to the nation in discourse? Are there multiple fantasmatic Russias, and how much intersection is there between them? And do they, at least in part, occupy the same fantasmatic space in various forms of in the national imagination, so that some mutual intelligibility is retained?

A psychoanalytic approach seeks to locate the fantasmatic logic that is at play whenever one identifies with something. If we treat narrative in itself as a possible psychic defence mechanism, a semblance of stability where there is none, this means paying close attention to what the narrative structure could be trying to achieve, as well as its gaps. However, it also requires not giving in to the 'lure of narrative' entirely:

Limits to making sense, to making connections, have to be set. The point here is that it may be consoling, therapeutic even, to have sense made of one's mystifying miseries, one's uncertainties and partial understandings (Frosh, 2007: 638).

When certain positions in the interview situation appear to require reiteration or repetition, this could point to the fragility and instability of the position assumed, and the gap between available subject positions and the subject. Finally, it means looking for the ‘enjoyment’ that is the result of taking up a specific subject position, as “the problem is that, without taking into account enjoyment, the whole Lacanian framework loses most of its explanatory force” (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003: 135). However, as Frosh points out, this analytic “move ‘beyond’ has to be made respectfully and cautiously, to be sure: there is no certainty of interpretation” (Frosh et al, 2003:52), as it is here that the interviewer’s interpretations could lead to the greatest distortions. At the same time, it can be argued that researchers using psychoanalytic concepts come to the research process with greater reflexivity. They are aware of the impact the analyst’s interpretations have on analysis, as well as crucial roles of transference and countertransference – notions that may be transposed both to the interview setting and the context of textual analysis.

**

With these considerations in mind, the following discursive operations were identified within the data on the basis of a preliminary analysis of the 8 interviews:

- Disavowal
- Disidentification (with available Russian subject positions)
- Mythologisation or romanticisation (of Russian character, history)
- Reference to fantasmatic origin of Russianness (pre-Revolution, pre-Peter the Great, pre-Ivan the Terrible)
- Loving Russia(n culture)
- Splitting (into good & bad Russia)

Linguistically, particular attention was paid to interruptions, ellipses and repetitions, to the addressees of particular statements (and to those who were being excluded), as well as to the use of metaphors. Discursive strategies were translated into more psychoanalytic terms when the above-mentioned patterns in language use were seen to warrant it and fit the data well.

Disidentification

The type of disidentification encountered in the interviews is one that repudiates any overt emotional or affective ties to the nation. This mode of discourse is located in a

register which is ostensibly devoid of affect, instead it is characterised by rationality. In answering the question of whether being Russian has a meaning for him, Yura³⁸, a 30-year old PhD student in anthropology from Moscow dismisses the notion of any palpable attachment to Russianness:

Yura: Well, to me being Russian means you were born in Russia, you grew up in Russia, so you have to call yourself something, ok, then let's say you are Russian, you speak Russian language as the mother tongue, for instance, yeah? On the other hand, of course you could try to, em, to compare different cultures and say that Russian culture has a particular flavour and everybody who grew in that culture will have internalized it to some extent and therefore will be Russian in term of the cultural identity. Uh, yeah...and now that particular meaning of identity doesn't really appeal to me that much, because I am...I have, I have trouble, really, like accepting that people internalize their cultural identity to such an extent that it will be noticeable 20, 30 years later or something like that.

He presents those that confess to retaining these ties (or rather, displaying them) as having chosen to keep up this attachment. His statement that he has “trouble accepting”- indicates resistance, or an attempt to distinguish oneself from those that do identify. Unfortunately, there is little indication of what they might represent for Yura. Throughout the interview, there is a palpable sense of discomfort and a clear unwillingness to use more emotive language. This may not be related to the interview topic, but to the fleeting, frequently one-off nature of interviews in general. However, it does mean that whenever possible Yura will operationalize the subject position of a social scientist (anthropologist), enabling him to apply a theoretical rather than personal perspective on the world. This type of language acts as a barrier, and while a short interview does not provide enough material to draw reasonable inferences about his underlying reasons, it does demonstrate that it is difficult to justifiably speak of identification without affective investment, or without any discursive move that would indicate affect. Does an assumption of Russianness performed by the subject therefore also need to indicate a sense of fantasmatic enjoyment? And should we assume that the interviewee's reticence is symptomatic of his relationship with Russia and Russianness, or ‘merely’ symptomatic of his everyday conduct? His assertion that “I don't know how well I would fit” once again represents an act of withdrawal of the self from the notion of Russianness, as well as a signal to the interviewer, indicating or reinforcing that Russianness does not exist in a vacuum. Yura rejects the notion of identity as fate, and

³⁸ All names are pseudonyms chosen by the interviewees.

instead posits the existence of agency over how much Russianness is assumed by the individual. At the same time there is a clear desire to differentiate himself from others who left Russia:

Yura: Em, but, em, yeah, I don't know how strongly I would personally fit, how, how well I would fit stereotypical expectations of Russianness that you might have. Maybe, to some extent...

While it can be safely assumed that no one wishes to coincide completely with a stereotype, or indeed believes themselves to resemble it, Yura makes it clear that he views the distance between himself and what he believes to be potential expectations of Russianness as especially large. In part this is perhaps out of a resistance to the fact that the interview topic was ostensibly that of national identity, so that the fear of being reduced to the category of national belonging may have been present. However, there is nevertheless a clear intention to distance oneself 'personally' from associations with Russianness which goes beyond the need to establish a distinct subject position within the realm of the interview.

In describing these tendencies in Yura's account, the question may arise whether these simply represent a quirk of the individual in question. In fact, while as much discursive context as possible is provided for each of the interviewees cited in this chapter, each discursive strategy commented upon is also understood to be operating in the broader population. Their individual manifestations serve to sensitise the researcher to discursive operations more broadly deployed in the sample of interview and survey respondents. Thus the *distancing* so prevalent throughout the interview with Yura is both an individual trait in terms of the type of language operationalised (analytic, depersonalised), and part of a discursive pattern of highlighting one's ability to overcome any overt attachment to the nation (see chapter V).

Disavowal

If the first excerpt speaks of a desire to be more, or anything but a representative of Russianness, despite the effort this may require, the next conversation yielded a different example of relating to the nation: that of remaining attached to certain fantasmatic aspects of its past, despite full awareness of the contrary. This instance of disavowal is to be found in the following excerpt from a conversation with Katia, a 22-year-old MSc student from Moscow, who had been asked to give a description of how she imagined

life in the Soviet Union in order to get a feel for the past is spoken of in relation to the present:

Maria: So you don't remember any of that, but you certainly have an idea of what life in the Soviet Union looked like...could you give me a little description of how you imagine life in the Soviet Union? Say, for your parents...

Katia: Yeah. And,er, actually I have a very positive view of what was in the Soviet Union. Of course, yes, my image is quite positive, even if I know what, for example, my family says, what limitations were of the USSR, but, despite all that, and, in spite of that, I believe it was good (laughs). It was not bad, and, er, actually, there were lots of..my present image of life in this, er, Soviet Union, was shaped by different films, and they were, some of them I like very, very much, and actually...

[...] I don't have any, actually bad, er, thoughts about life in the USSR, even if I know that, er, it wasn't that easy. (Laughs)

Her words of “Of course my image is...even though...” and “I don’t have any bad...even though I know” are strongly reminiscent of Mannoni’s evocation of “*Je sais bien, mais quand meme*” (Mannoni, 1969). Certain phantasmatic images clearly resist rationalization or supersession by more historically representative narratives. These are the images, as well as certain practices, that a nation has to rely on in order to affect processes of national identification. They are both highly individual, and highly conventional, clichéd. Katia herself makes explicit reference to such images of the past which serve as a ‘repository of affect’, of positive, warm emotions. The source often appears to be cinematic, as it is images that seem especially conducive to activating these processes. The traditional film operates on the premise that the audience identifies with its characters, or with its setting. According to Judith Butler’s (1990) reading of Laplanche and Pontalis (1967), the type of identification which takes place the moment that one is affected by filmic images is phantasmatic in nature. It allows several points of entry into the (cinematic) scene, so that the viewer can potentially assume the role of each of the characters and each detail of the scene’s staging, which leads to a kind of *desubjectivisation* of the individual who is identifying. This implies that there is never a straightforward charting of the interaction between onscreen activity and the viewer. However, it does beg the question of whether one’s fantasy can be transformed through the act of identifying. That is, are there psychic traces after a repeated exposure to a certain type of cinematic image? In this case, if a certain, seductive representation of what the Soviet Union *felt like* is projected through film, could it have replaced other, official representations?

In her characterization of life in the Soviet Union, Katia speaks tautologically:

Katia: [...]even according to my family's stories I know that, er, it was like with Germans nowadays, er, Soviet people united, abroad for example. They went together to different places and, er, it was normal, it was, er, yeah, it was just a right of things. And, but...there was unity in society. The society was united, and it was good (laughs).

“There was unity in society. The society was united, and it was good”: according to Pavon Cuellar, subjects can engage in repetition as a way of making discourse true, of making it exist: “To be empty, a discourse should be contradictory, but repetitive. To a certain extent, the discursive emptiness can be assured by the recurrence of a signifier in a ‘tautological’ discourse..” (Pavon Cuellar, 2010: 238). The above excerpts also open up the question of how the past is accessed by subjects, particularly a past that was not experienced personally. Katia gives the impression of having to make a choice between images, especially moving images, and the narratives of others.

Her attachment to imaginary aspects of the past also enable, or are sought out in order to perform a far more overtly emotive relationship with Russianness and Russia than that of Yura. When asked what she associates with being Russian, she replies:

Katia: Do you remember the moment when Natasha Rostova, she went to the countryside, to her uncle's if you remember, and she heard, em, native folk songs...

Maria: She dances...

Katia: Yeah, she danced. The, and Tolstoy discusses, this girl, she was brought according to maybe French principles, she had British gouvernante and something like that, yeah, and the lifestyle of, em, nobility, of high society was absolutely European, Western European, but she danced, because it was something native. Actually, I will also dance, because it feels so, so, native, so dear, actually, to me. Yeah, when I hear some Russian folk songs, it, hm, I actually feel myself Russian, so... (Laughs).

She constructs Russianness as something to be felt (see the repeated use of the word ‘feel’, ‘dear’, ‘happy’), and there are explicit references to the practices that create the kind of *enjoyment* which is meant to sustain nations, such as celebrations, festivals, as well as supporting one’s team in international sports event and competitions (Stavrakakis, 2007). It is worth quoting Stavrakakis at length here:

In his *Identification* seminar, for example, Lacan will argue that the subject can momentarily experience something akin to an attainment of his or her identification: ‘at this unique instant demand and desire coincide, and it is this which gives to the ego this blossoming of identificatory joy from which *jouissance* springs’ (seminar of 2 May 1962). A national war victory or the successes of the national football team are examples of such experiences of enjoyment at the national level” (Stavrakakis, 2007: 197).

The 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi are representative of politicians’ and governments’ desire to recreate this ‘unique instant’. Take for instance, journalist Oleg Kashin’s description of the Games as an ‘ideological event’³⁹, that is, a PR-exercise to improve the President’s image at a time of popular discontent. Thus the opening ceremony specifically referenced ‘glorious’ episodes from Russia’s past so as to create a natural, affective link with its present, culminating in the (hoped for) national fervour of the Olympic Games. Katia’s response similarly echoes this sentiment of national belonging through sport:

[...]. *Yeab, I’m very proud, for example, when Russians for example win something in the Olympics (laughs), and if they do I proud of being Russian (both laugh), so...and all those things make me feel Russian, actually....*

As Katia professes these strong emotional ties to certain *aspects* of Russian culture, it may appear paradoxical that the most strongly felt moment of self-ascribed identification is lifted straight from the pages of a classical Russian novel. It also sheds a different light on Masha’s later comment about the cultural ‘poverty’ of the 1990s (“...but probably what gets me more is how poor culturally the country was in the 90s”) and begs the question of whether this particular contingent of interviewees requires a degree of *poeticisation* or *romanticisation* in order to be able to identify with a version of the nation, and whether this is perhaps a necessary condition for identification to take place. When she says:

[...] *some people say that they actually don’t feel there is nationality. I think if you think a bit more you will understand what’s your nationa...what is your identity...National identity.*

This could be read as a direct response to Yura’s expressed lack of conviction in the coherence or continued existence of national identity. The two clearly operate on

³⁹ <http://kashin.guru/2014/05/21/polska/>

different registers of discourse, Yura's being that of a social scientist, Katia's being affective and relying on imagined and real visceral sensations. Here, the nation is performed via key cultural signifiers.

Mythologisation

Describing Russianness can also entail an element of 'making strange'.

What gets presented in terms of a critique is at the same time an instance of *mythologisation* of the Russian character - a character that appears to have been left unchanged by modernity and the belated introduction of capitalism, and that evokes a mixture of exasperation and admiration:

Andrey: I mean that, er, people have different way of doing things they have different way of living. Traditions, maybe. They are not totally in the modern world. Er, it's very...maybe example? Ok, so, er, they don't appreciate a job, don't appreciate earning money, for instance, don't appreciate personal efforts to work. Don't appreciate achievements, sometimes, Of course, it's, it depends, but it's more in the country than in the cities.

The use of the third person pronoun indicates the emphasis of distance between Andrey, a 34-year-old MSc student from St Petersburg, and most Russians – where Andrey has moved on, most Russians have stayed behind. One needs of course to be aware that any interview question asking the respondent to define a group necessarily entails a reifying of this group or category. However, as an alternative, Andrey could have used a first person pronoun here, but he (un)consciously decided not to, in strong contrast to what Wodak et al (1999) define as one of the fundamental *macro-strategies* employed by individuals to construct national identity discursively. These *constructive strategies* include linguistic acts such as using the pronoun 'we' which would "invite identification and solidarity" (Wodak et al, 1999: 160). Another remarkable absence which deserves mentioning here is the relative lack of *perpetuation strategies*, which would serve to "maintain, support and reproduce national identities" (ibid.) by relying on metaphors which emphasise the need to 'stick together' as a nation. In the present context, it certainly serves to reinforce the above-mentioned discourse of lazy Russian villagers who are themselves to blame for any lack of progress or wealth ("*They don't appreciate...*").

Later in the interview, there is a change from third- to first-person pronoun, in a comment that is highly reminiscent of Sergey Sokolov's assessment of the structure of Russian society⁴⁰:

Andrey: This weekend I just was in the British country, I was a guest of some elder person for a couple of days, so I saw this life...in the UK, I can see that main difference is the lack of self-organisation of Russian people on the lower level, so the thing you name community...actually we don't have community in Russia. Of course we have this level of government, we have it, yeah? But according to the entire meaning of this word, we don't have these relationships, where people together, trying to solve problems, we don't have it. People are very individual, even in the cities.

There appear to be two distinct purposes to this: one is to continue the critique of the contemporary Russian way of life, which he characterises as highly individualistic and socially dispersed, thereby elevating the level of criticism away from the primitivism he describes earlier. Further into the discussion, he includes himself once more in his description, this time to foreground the aspects of Russian identity that, though conditioned by the many negative features he mentions earlier, in fact provide an advantage:

Andrey: [...]We know nothing about next decade, we can hardly imagine. On one side, it's not so good, because we can't build plans, private plans as well. We, er, are moving, moving. But it is an advantage that it is an opportunity. We are more open to new things, to...So I think, that to be Russian is to have a wider horizon for opportunities.

It is here that the use of the pronoun is more obviously motivated by a desire to align oneself with those Russians who prevail despite the odds, and even manage to benefit from them.

In fact, the mythologisation of Russian national character together with emphasis placed on the dichotomy between town and country is a dominant discursive strategy throughout the interviews, as well as in media accounts of contemporary and historic Russia. Russians are constructed as a people of extremes, capable of great feats, but

⁴⁰ Russian society does not exist. It is a sort of atomised substance, whose elements live lives that are completely disconnected from each other. (Interview with BBC Russia, 11.11.2010)

always teetering on the brink of self-destruction. According to Natasha, a 26-year-old student from Krasnodar in Southern Russia:

Natasha: Sorry, I just want to add, I would say that Russians, they don't have any brakes.

Maria: OK, brakes (laughs). What do you mean by that?

Natasha: So we're very...if they start doing something, they can't, they can't, er, you know, find...they can't stop themselves. They don't have any limits. So if they start drinking they can drink too much, if they start spending money, they can spend too much, if they start, I don't know... so, they don't have any limits.

Like any stereotype or dominant discourse, it serves to order and structure certain behaviours and subsequently converts them into truths. At times one may be led to conclude that the very fatalism of this discourse acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to Pavon Cuellar, the frequent repetition of a term or statement serves to resolve contradiction, which is inherent in discourse: “Actually, for all I know, repetition is the only effective intra-discursive remedy for the contradiction that divides the subject” (Pavon Cuellar, 2010: 238).

One might agree that every representation of Russia or Russians is merely a creation that misses some aspects while reifying, if not always romanticising or mythologising others. However, some characterisations are produced in a more self-conscious, postmodern spirit, that is, in full awareness of their constructedness:

Maria: And you've given me a few glimpses. How would describe that, if I just asked you about that?⁴¹

Irina: Yeah. I guess that's also a myth at this point, em, or, like a mental space that I have created for myself. I don't know. Em, because, I mean there's, maybe it's not, bleak was, like, a, not a very good word choice I suppose, maybe gaudy would be a better word now? Just with a, em, just a popculture, you know, and, em, the materialism that is just overwhelming among the young people. But then there are the babushkas, that's sort of bleak. Em, em, just I guess the poverty and the lack of hope and, you know, just the socioeconomic situation that is kind of causing despair. So, yeah it's definitely a country of contrasts to me. My country, you know, my Russia, my very limited experience of Russia.

⁴¹ Reference is made to “post-soviet, provincial reality” mentioned by Irina.

Like many of the respondents, Irina, a 22-year-old student from Yoshkar-Ola⁴² seems unwilling to commit to one definitive representation of Russia – she insists on the subjective quality of her answer once more through the repeated use of the personal pronoun (“my country, my Russia”). The following statements also confirm that one of the underlying reasons for this may be an inability to unite the conflicting elements that make up this ‘post-soviet provincial reality’. In her description she initially uses both ‘gaudy’ and ‘bleak’, located as they are at opposing ends of the colour spectrum.

At the same time, her insistence on its subjective quality allows for a rather unorthodox approach to the question, which enables her to answer it in terms of aesthetics, as she describes the country as resisting rationalisation (another prevalent cliché). Whether reproduced automatically, or presented more self-consciously, the recurrent drive towards mythologisation of national character does prompt the reflection of what it means to employ a myth. What does it enable subjects to make sense of? And, additionally, what does it mean to employ this strategy consciously, even self-consciously? One answer points back to processes of identification: only by inhabiting a shared imaginary can subjects be linked in collective identification:

The bond of affection and collective identification with the nation is established not only through common ways of life but *also through cultural myths* that constitute the phantasmatic space of the national imagination. (Boym, 1995: 134, my emphasis).

However, it appears that following the crisis of investiture which affects institutions as well as also ideological and cultural edifices, one way of reinvigorating these cultural myths is to first imbue with personal relevance, thus turning them into ‘own private Russias’ (Santner, 1997). A subject position Irina thus willingly assumes later in the interview is that of a Russian woman grappling with outsiders’ representations of Russia. It appears to allow her to speak of herself as actively engaging with Russia as a Russian (albeit from abroad), to regain a sense of agency:

[...]I'm fighting against the perception of Russia as backward, wild, oppressive; of Russian women as promiscuous, greedy mail order brides or blonde communist spies. Paradoxically, I am trying to present a Russia that's still backward, wild, and oppressive

⁴² Capital of the Mari El republic in Russia.

- but illuminated with a mysterious, ancient light from within, unknown to itself, fantastic and poetic, and soulful. I am trying to project an image of an intelligent, free, magical woman, a forest witch that's only civilized on the surface.

Why do I do this? Because I think that the West needs a Russia of this kind.

Now what if I am NOT in the West? If I am not in the West or in the Western mindset, I am inevitably dancing in the woods, swimming in lakes, singing folk songs in the fields, cooking with my grandmother, going to the cemetery with my mother. This is my Russia: elemental, ancient, wholesome, pagan⁴³.

The repeated use of the present continuous presents her as engaging in the “struggle” for an alternative view on Russia, without, however, indicating how she aims to achieve this. By focusing on ‘projecting’ a certain image of Russia, she is essentially turning an act of self-stylisation into a political act, showing a desire to be seen as Russian and for this ‘Russianness’ to acquire meaning. The meaning she does want to project reflects that same wish to *idealise* Russianness via the Russian soul, which she has endowed with features (“elemental, ancient, wholesome, pagan”) and which appear to have been drawn from a repository of fairy-tale images. In the introduction it was reiterated that, according to Serguei Oushakine writing in 2001, the post-soviet discursive field fails to provide its subjects with “a clearly located position from which to address others and to be addressed” (Oushakine, 2001: 300). In 2010, this still appeared to be true – Irina forges a subject position that enables her to identify with Russianness, but which has little in common with everyday elements of Russian life. Indeed, the emphatically capitalised ‘NOT’ seems to speak not merely of identification via differentiation, but identification through *negation*.

Prelapsarian states

This absence of viable subject positions in post-soviet Russia implies that there was a time when these were more readily available. In some retellings, the history of Russia becomes the history of the loss of such positions, and of a ‘brighter future’ that would do justice to the country’s imagined potential. In Andrey’s words: “*And actually, the great part of Russian history is just a loss of these opportunities*”. While this is true of any ‘history’ depending on how one chooses to tell it, the notion of a ‘failed potentiality’ appears to be a particularly persistent strand of discourse. There is a series of losses which keep being

⁴³ Irina had offered to provide further reflections via email. This is an excerpt of her response to the question “what does being Russian mean to you?”.

referred to: first the October Revolution, which is seen to have brought an end to a kind of cultural and even social apogee, and is at times represented as having plunged Russians back into a darker, less civilized time. Second, the collapse of the Soviet Union, an entity which is paradoxically described as a great destroyer of tradition and values in the same breath. Nevertheless, its breakdown is seen to have led to a further unmooring, made all the more painful by the chaos of the 1990s: “*after Soviet Union collapsed, er, it is a gap...in this place of universe*” (Andrey).

When Masha, a 26-year old literature student from St Petersburg, is asked to recollect the 1990s, her speech becomes elliptical, almost disintegrates, giving further evidence of the traumatic nature of the 1990s in the consciousness of most Russians:

Masha: Ah...suddenly there was this...I don't know...there was a lot of Mafia things, and I don't know, it just ticked in my mind, a lot of these kinds of guys in leather jackets hanging around, a lot of these stupid films, like, really rubbish film (interviewer laughs), horrible, horrible films. Em, yeah, just a lot of...and I mean, money then became...even not money, but getting stuff. Stuff became really important. Clothes and, em, suddenly. And just changes, a lot of changes. Changes in prices, and like, all the time, and I remember '98, and it was horrible, I mean, overnight everything just changed, unbelievable. I don't know, it was really stressful being at school. Looking back at it now, and just remembering how stressed our teachers were, I mean, it's ridiculous. A lot of, kind of, screaming. Teachers, especially women, they were quite aggressive. Looking back at it now you might think that they had obviously been affected as well. (long pause) Yeah, just not really knowing what's going on, what's happening, that was a bit scary. (long pause). Hm. Just kind of, just going to the markets, because there weren't many shops, and I just remember it being very, just messy and...getting something or doing something bureaucratic was always, yeah, I just remember these queues and all these offices. I mean, things didn't change very much, but it was really, really worse then. (long pause) But probably what gets me more is how poor culturally the country was in the 90s.

While it may be an impossible task to characterise a time in one's life or a historical period, the way these are narrativised is still indicative of their impact, the traces they left in the individual and social psyche. In the operation of this text, it involves ellipses, repetitions (see her repeated use of the word “change”), long pauses and a general sense of chaos and disturbance. The interruptions to the flow of narrative convey the idea of a disruption to the flow of life, while the reiteration of “looking back at it now” points to a retroactive attempt to make sense of seemingly unconnected episodes and images, and an inability to accomplish this. The 1990s remain a lacuna, thus thwarting an attempts to seamlessly integrate them into a temporal and personal trajectory – there appears to be only the ‘before’ of the Soviet Union and the ‘after’ that coincides with Putinism (See

Chapter VII). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, an attempt to forge a national project out of a rejection or disavowal of almost an entire decade inevitably leads to blockages, as well as recurrent usage of past signifiers.

In fact, in some interpretations, the watershed moment after which Russia ceased to be moving towards what it could have been, is located even earlier, in 1917:

Masha: But I often think about what it is to be Russian. I often think about how differently things would have been, what it would be to be Russian, if there wouldn't be 1917, there wouldn't be revolution, there wouldn't be communism...things would just go on after 1917 as they were. I think that's quite interesting. What it would be like...what it would be like then. Would we be more Russian? Or is the Communist Party part of being truly Russian, or is just a group of some kind of mad guys? Yeah, these kinds of things I think about. I don't know what I should be associating myself with. Should I be associating myself with communism as well, or should I just, you know, associate myself, kind of choose and pick what to be Russian, or is it a whole kind of box? Do I have to take it...[...] ..is it something where you would sort of think 'yeah, that's part of my history', or is it something you just want to erase, and just not consider....I mean, is it worth really being part of your history?

This leads to the contradictory operation where an idea of a Russia that was somehow more Russian before a certain event is constructed, while simultaneously associating Russianness with distinct elements of Soviet culture and society (*“Everything that was written and done before...before 1917, before the Revolution” [...] “If there wouldn't be 1917, if there wouldn't be communism”...*). The latter is perhaps self-evident, considering that all of the interviewees were born in the Soviet Union. However, for many the origin of ‘true Russianness’ is located elsewhere, in a pre-Soviet past (or, in one case, prior to Ivan the Terrible). This falls in line with the idea referred to by Žižek that, in order to conceal its non-existence, a society or nation needs to create the myth of a ‘Golden Age’ before it was deprived (usually, although not in this case, by an outside force) of its essential qualities:

The paradox to be fully accepted is that when a certain historical moment is (mis)perceived at the moment of loss of some quality, upon closer inspection it becomes clearer that the lost quality emerged only at this very moment of its alleged loss (Žižek, 1997: 14).

This recurrent referencing of a time when Russia was free from many of the social problems it currently experiences often leads to an evocation of greater spirituality and

(hence) greater cultural output. Notably, in the online ‘Test for Russianness’⁴⁴, the majority of questions require an in-depth knowledge of Russian poetry, music and films, giving the impression that the preferred connotations of Russianness are of a cultural rather than a political nature. What is positive about Russia(ns) becomes retroactively associated with art and literature.

This interview excerpt is also indicative of the limits of the types of discourse an interview encounter can produce. There is both an orientation towards the interviewer, an adjustment of what is verbalised in accordance with circumstances – both the setting of the LSE, and the fact that the interviewees are outside of Russia at the time of the interview – and a certain level of self-censorship based on what the respondent expects the interviewer wants to hear or find palatable (*‘It might sound a bit sort of, I don’t know’...*). It would be going too far to refer to this as transference, but something is played out that speaks of previous relationships, and over which the interviewer has little control and lacks knowledge as to whether this is related by the interview questions, or the respondent’s personal history. The tone throughout this long answer is contemplative and equivocal, but ends in a somewhat defiant way. It appears that throughout the answer Masha has surveyed the subject positions seemingly made available to her through Russian history, and decides to reject them. This could be cited as an instance of *disidentification* – something she has already done in a physical sense by leaving the country, most likely for good. By asking whether something is ‘worthy’ of being part of one’s national history she also reveals that she holds on to an idealised concept of what the nation can represent, along with the possibilities of history. There is thus still, if no actual love for the nation in the sense of a strong attachment to an ideal, then a desire to achieve this level of attachment, and a sense of disappointment that the nation failed to live up to this potential. What unites many of the respondents is not an apparent love for the nation but a mourning of the absence of love.

While most interviewees referred to two breaks or gaps in Russian history, which heralded a series of traumatic changes, i.e. the end of the Soviet Union and the October Revolution, Natasha identifies the locus of true Russianness in an even remoter time, namely before Ivan the Terrible’s ascent to power.

⁴⁴ <http://www.kommersant.ru/k-vlast/vlast-test.asp>

Natasha:[...] what we have now, er, how we can explain, you know, our behavior, or our corruption and everything. It happens during Tsar, during, er, Ivan, you know, Ivan The Horrible times and oprichnina⁴⁵ ...

Maria: OK.

Natasha:...where he introduced, so, I mean, that we lived according to, you know, Christian laws and we were very, you know, we had, er, just I need to remember, you know, like, his idea...

Maria: Sure.

Natasha:I mean that, before his period of governing Russia, em, we had like, we had, we know that we are allowed to do this, we are not allowed to do this. But when he was Tsar you know he did so many horrible things, so, I mean that, sometimes, you know sometimes he did some things which contradicted with Christian laws and he introduced oprichnina and it changed people's mind because they realized, especially about oprichnina, because, you know, people during his time they, you know, they could be killed at any time.

True Russianness is thereby inextricably linked with “Christian laws”, which were followed until Tsar Ivan the Terrible and his henchmen “changed people’s mind”. Contrary to the usual version of such accounts, which supposedly rely on an antagonistic outside force to explain the loss of a nation’s or people’s essential quality, the change is to have come from within. This in itself could indicate that the usual model tends to rely on an oversimplified notion of internal versus external forces⁴⁶. At the same time, it is also characteristic of the aforementioned way in which Russians themselves discursively construct Russianness in terms of extremes, both good and bad (‘generous but frivolous’, ‘heroic but reckless’), so that the most virtuous behaviour is paired with the most immoral tendencies.

Another discursive tendency present throughout the interviews, that is, a referencing of works of literature or cinema, is also present in Natasha’s account. According to her, the film *Tsar* (Pavel Lungin, 2009), to which she refers in her attempt to “explains Russian mentality nowadays”. Beyond being sceptical of such a statement, it is perhaps more worthwhile to inquire into the underlying reasons for this consistent practice of citation. Why are films better equipped to respond or provide an answer to questions about the

⁴⁵ Period of Russian history between 1565 and 1572 during which Tsar Ivan the Terrible instituted a domestic policy of secret police, mass repressions and confiscation of land from Russian aristocracy.

⁴⁶ For example, the pariah in much of contemporary German discourse – the ‘benefit scrounger’ – is ‘truly and essentially’ German according to most criteria, both ethnic and cultural.

nature of Russianness? Recall that one of Masha's first recollections of the 1990s is of films ([...] "*a lot of these stupid films, like, really rubbish film....horrible, horrible films*"). This, together with the fact that they also occur in the interviews with Katia and later Natasha, open up the question of whether cinematic images are a kind of imaginary supplement to an otherwise fractured representation of the past. If we concede that identity formations can be based on an internalisation of phantasmatic objects, as well as remembering the notion that any kind of affective investment needs to be routed via fantasy, this may indeed be the case. De Lauretis appears to have just this in mind when she states that "today cinema's unique effectiveness in the production of a social imaginary (public fantasies) is understood to work through the phantasmatic production it elicits and shapes in individual spectators (private fantasies)" (Lauretis, 2008: 16).

When giving an account, there is always the need to produce a coherent story, so one may ask why it is not preferable to refer to a pre-existing story rather than invest in the work of creating one afresh. After all "the feeling remains that whenever we try to say something completely, the saying of it misses the point. [...] There are, simply, *too many* ways of speaking about things, and to do them justice one would have to use all these different ways, all at once" (Frosh, 2007: 641). The very conviction with which respondents evoke these images and scenes from works of art suggests that they are seen to represent the essence of Russianness more coherently and more *convincingly* than the interviewees' personal impressions. Returning to the Žižekian account of the phantasmatic nature of ideology, or rather, the ideological nature of fantasy, one can see how successful⁴⁷ narratives become integrated into both discourse and fantasy, giving another indication of where they might overlap. In fact, one of the methodological findings of this chapter is that the visual, that is, *imaginary* form, as salient in the respondents' accounts which feature cinematic scenes, intrudes upon and does a different kind of substantiating work to that identified by a more strictly linguistic or discursive frame.

Nostalgic fantasies

Interestingly, as indicated in responses by Katia and Irina, at times it appears more straightforward, or less troubling to relate to *Soviet* Russia than it is to establish a stable relationship with present-day Russia. This attachment, as illustrated in the following

⁴⁷ In terms of its ability to tell a story that allows for processes of identification by the viewer or reader, not necessarily in terms of artistic merit.

excerpt, is not always predicated on an altogether positive or rose-tinted vision of the past. When I asked for more detail in response to a reference she had made to a time when she had ‘actively sought out the Soviet experience’, Irina responded:

*Irina: Ye...yeah. Just, I mean, I read a lot of history and, like, stayed up ‘til two in the morning crying over, you know, horrible things that happened during thirties, and, em, went to the museums, looked for old buildings, and tried to learn the history, just local history, em, wore a lot of Soviet dresses, my mum’s dresses, my grandmother’s dresses, so, yeah, it was, just, I guess the main thing that I still love about it and am still drawn to is how, I guess, how at the same time I think of the Soviet life as very catchy, and obviously just, I mean, the propaganda and the formulaic speech of people and objects and just, everything loud and not, like there aren’t many, er, nuances, I guess, but at the same time there is this delicacy, that, em, comes from poverty and lack of resources, intellectual resources and, em, just any input, and so this, I guess, idea of people making do with the small space that they have, you know, the small space in the *kommunalka*⁴⁸, and, you know, the little money, and this one book, I don’t know, the, like, printed copy of something, does it make sense?*

She stresses its ‘catchiness’ and ‘formulaic speech’, vestiges of which can still be encountered in present-day Russia, perhaps even more so in smaller towns such as her hometown Yoshkar-Ola. In her quest to see and describe the world in aesthetic terms, the ‘retro-feel’ of all things Soviet is presented as attractive, even fascinating. Here Irina engages in a wilful and self-conscious aesthetisation of the past, perhaps succumbing to the same seductive qualities of the image referred to earlier. Like her self-styling as “a forest witch that's only civilized on the surface”, there is an agentic quality to this yielding to the past’s seductive powers. Both Katia and Irina are aware of the traumatic aspects of Soviet history (even though few born after the 1950s have direct experience of them), but this does not diminish the appeal of Soviet aesthetics. If our experience of reality is strongly reliant on fantasy, then images that lend themselves more easily to being incorporated in this fantasy are perhaps those that have been reworked through narrativisations in popular culture and family lore.

This is strongly reminiscent of the type of attachment usually characterised as nostalgia. The immersive experiences that Irina describes as having sought out resemble the “‘magical thinking’ that is such an important element of nostalgic reverie, that is, the temporary suspension of the reality principle” (Nikelly, 2004: 184). The fact that this reverie enables “the ego to “regress into memories and fantasies of long ago” (ibid.) links it to the situation of ‘narcissistic withdrawal’ which was seen as a consequence of the

⁴⁸ Communal flat.

‘discursive arrest’ of the 1990s (Oushakine, 2000: 1011). In his psychoanalytic reading of nostalgia, Nikelly further points out that the initial investment in the object, be it a parental figure or one’s country of birth, was most likely of an ambivalent nature, and that nostalgic feelings are frequently borne out of an attempt to retain the positive attachment, and resist the resolution of this tension that mourning would require. Crucially, it appears here that this ambivalence has been transposed onto a different era. The reference Irina makes to ‘crying’, to her seeking out of negative affect, may indeed be a performative re-enactment of a type of mourning. Pertaining as it does to a past of which she has virtually no recollection, this is a psychically ‘safe’ endeavour out of which she can exit and re-enter at will.

Splitting the nation

When Natasha is asked what being Russian means to her, she locates it in the realm of culture and aesthetics, like Katia and Irina before her:

Maria: [...] I'll just ask you how you feel, but er, what er, what does it mean, does it mean anything to you? I mean, Russian, having a Russian nationality?

Natasha: Em, good question. My personality, you know, what people could expect from my behaviour, I think. My culture. I would this is the most important thing, my culture, because I love my culture. For me it's like...you know, I, I would say that I divide Russia into two things, politics and culture, and you know, I devoted, I'm, you know, I'm very loyal to Russian culture, but I am not about Russian politics, I mean, I mean, it's a big, it's a contradiction. I mean, why...so why people sometimes, they don't want to live in Russia. Not just because they don't like their country. They just don't feel themselves safe there, they just don't like the politics, the, you know, that, you know, politics, political system, or, you know, but they are Russians inside because of their culture, it's, you know, I think, I think you should understand what you mean, I mean but by, I mean my...I'm Russian, it means my culture, first of all, so what I got from my parents, my grandparents, and what I have in my genes.

Hence, because she loves culture, or rather, the cultural output of Russia, she finds herself ‘loving’ Russia’ with an affection that is reminiscent of the love for the ‘contingent circumstance of one’s birth’. *Loving* one’s country of birth becomes an example of a ‘forced choice’ – lacking control of where one is born and raised, one is better off loving it, so that “the contingent circumstances of one’s birth are transformed into an object of love; what is unavoidable becomes ethically sanctioned” (Dolar, 1993:82). This ‘forced choice’ results in the expectation that the nation (as a construct or an ideal) can be loved, and that a lack of love for it impoverishes one’s life, or at least

adds complication. It is perhaps this ‘readiness to love’ that makes one vulnerable to glorified images of the nation (together with the narcissistic gains to be had from) – be they purely phantasmatic, or merely phantasmatic representations in art and literature – which satisfy this need to feel attached.

For Masha the difficult question of ‘what Russia is about’ similarly leads to a referral to literature, and the values gleaned in the works of classical 19th century Russian literature:

Masha: Em, I really think that Russian kind of inheritance in terms of literature and culture, everything that was written and done before...I don't know...before 1917, before the Revolution, basically, I think that still has a lot of effect on people. And hopefully this is what one day what, I don't know, people will kind of go back to. They'll realise that that's what's really really precious. And that's what Russia is about. About charity, about patriotism, about people giving up their lives for their country. Em....about people being reckless, but in a kind of amazing, heroic way. Yeah, these kinds of things. That I can only...well, not only, but you read about it in Russian literature. They are very dear to me. I am really proud of that, really proud of this. Especially as I studied Russian literature, it made me so happy to be Russian. It's not that I chose to study Russian literature because I'm Russian, because it's that I really loved....em...but actually being Russian, that always made me think: I am so proud to be a part of it.

These cardinal features include the kindness and spirituality which is repeatedly cited by both interview and later survey participants, and which is contrasted with the ‘real existing’, manifest demeanour of Russians in contemporary Russia. Literature has always enjoyed a particularly elevated status in Russia, where its dissemination and reception are closely intertwined with the self-perception of its intelligentsia⁴⁹. Indeed, one prevalent Soviet dissident practice in Moscow in the 1960s was to organise public readings of poetry as a form of subversive, anti-government action.

What transpires here is that one of the ways to enable a relationship with Russia that is characterised by positive affect is to engage in a form of *splitting*, reminiscent of the ways in which Melanie Klein utilises the notion. Natasha admits herself that she “splits” Russia into good and bad components. The cultural output of Russia (though certainly not all of it) inspires feelings of “devotion” and “loyalty”, tying it to the types of affect that characterise group formation and coherence in the Freudian account. Politics seem to inspire a wholly negative reaction, which is not fully verbalised, but which is positioned

⁴⁹ See the important role of *samizdat* and *tamizdat* in the Soviet Union. See also the common reference to “Manuscripts don’t burn” from Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* (1967).

in strong contrast or “contradiction” to all that is lovable about Russia, represented by culture. Culture can be internalised because of its positive, possibly phantasmatic connotations. Hence: “they are Russians inside because of their culture”.

The social world is frequently encountered as chaotic and threatening. One way of managing the resultant anxiety is the splitting off and projecting outwards of its negative aspects. While the notion of splitting – as typical of the *paranoid position* – was formulated in response to certain processes Melanie Klein observed in young infants, it shares with its later application to the wider social world a concern with phantasmatic processes. The good/bad objects are constituted as a result of symbolisation, or a failure to do so. Oushakine observed a similar process when asking students in Russia about their representations of “New Russia” in the late 1990s: “The ‘good’ Motherland is taken “inside, hummed as a song, while the ‘bad’ Motherland is projected *out-* and *downward*” (Oushakine, 2001: 309). This ‘rhetorical splitting’, which is similar to Natasha’s presentation of Russia in starkly binary terms of ‘good’ culture and ‘bad’ politics then results in an idealisation of the good object, and an abjection of the bad. By de facto constituting Russia in these terms, perhaps to ward off some of the anxiety that its ever-changing political and social landscape has produced since the early 1990s, one is simultaneously making it impossible to engage with what one has expelled from one’s psyche at so much personal cost. From here, it could be assumed that one of the underlying reasons a large majority of Russians refuses or fails to engage with Russian politics is that the cost would simply be too high. At the same time, it is important from a theoretical perspective to ask whether it might be worthwhile to retain, or re-introduce the distinction between identification and introjection, whereby the former “involves an alteration in the subject’s self-representation” (Lapping, 2012: 148), whereas in the latter “the internalized object is kept apart from the sense of self” (ibid.).

Conclusion

These interviewees lament the absence of a sense of community or solidarity, while simultaneously emphasising that they see no possibility of identifying with contemporary instantiations of Russianness. However, there is a distinct desire to *love* the nation, which finds its expression either in a sense of disappointment, resulting in a list of grievances against a Russia which has failed to make itself loveable, or a splitting into a good and a bad nation, so that what is perceived as worthy of love can be retained and internalised,

while the worthless Russia can be expelled. A similar dichotomy can be encountered in the way Russian national character is constructed and mythologised. The aspects of Russianness that are capable of inspiring affective investment can be found in the realm of aesthetics and culture. Characters and scenes from Russian novels and films are identified with *fantasmatically*, being first deemed worthy of identification, and then retroactively established as distinctly Russian. Some interviewees also allow for the possibility that a true (meaning: lovable) Russianness existed in the past, but lost these qualities through a usually sudden historical change or 'fall'. The last vestiges of a spirit of community are seen to be located in the Soviet Union. Once more the interviewees are disavowing the problematic side of Soviet history, despite being fully aware of it on the level of knowledge, in order to be able to hold on to, and fetishize, a certain version that can be integrated more easily into fantasy. This is again enabled by the peculiar qualities of images and symbols and the way they can circumvent certain discursive impasses..

Incidentally, the same focus on, and fetishisation of, aesthetics is what anti-government protesters operating in Russia's capital had been accused of during the most recent wave of anti-government protests in 2012 and 2013. While their sit-ins and flash mob-like events may represent a practice capable of creating the type of *enjoyment* necessary in order to evoke processes of national identification (Žižek, 1993), it was essentially an insular movement relying on a number of Master Signifiers such as 'democracy' and 'fair elections' which had failed to draw much support from the regions, potentially because their relevance to the majority of Russians was disputable.

**

As mentioned previously, the ambivalent attachments to the nation encountered here may also originate in the absence of freedom over one's place of birth – in other words, the type of 'forced choice' that stands at the beginning of the formation of subjectivity. One needs to distinguish between the kind of psychic imprint left by primary caregivers, and that of the nation, however, images of the nation are pervasive (Billig, 1995). In fact, the notion of 'home' is one that has managed to occupy the symbolic and affective terrain between national and familial attachments.

Subjects thus have to position themselves vis-à-vis the nation, though they are rarely called to do so explicitly. The empirical examples of the current and subsequent chapter provide insight into the problems subjects encounter when asked to recruit the discursive

means available to delineate this relationship, and the strategies they employ to circumvent these blockages. What emerges is that subjects have retained an implicit expectation of retaining a positive attachment to on the nation, which is coupled with an inability to maintain it. Discursively, the subject positions taken up the respondents clearly reflect their disciplinary or habitual vocabulary, so that some employed a more literary repertoire, whereas others were more firmly rooted in the linguistic habitus of social science. By looking at textual material collected online from a similar, but numerically larger contingent, the next chapter will therefore further assist in determining how much the discursive patterns established here are representative of different types of attachment, whether they merely originate in distinct discursive realms, and how much the two are possibly associated.

Chapter V: The Drunkard in the Rain: a psychosocial analysis of surveys on Russianness

I often recall that scene from 'Andrey Rublev' with the drunkard, in the rain, with a club in his hands which he is unable to control, and with which he attempts to reach ever-elusive ghosts. It's funny, and sad, and frightening. One even feels a little sympathetic: after all, when he's sober, he's a completely different person!⁵⁰

A Tale of Two Russias

The previous chapter addressed the idea of an internal splitting of Russia into good and bad objects as one way of managing the threat posed by an uncertain and ever-changing political and social terrain in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the interview, Natasha attempts to convey the experience of Russianness as one that is deeply infused with a lack of security:

I would say, like, main characteristics that it's, er, unpredictable, er, sometimes, I would say that for the majority of people you don't have the feeling of safety, that you are not secure, but just because of our experience, because of nineties, because of, er, you know, we don't have this feeling. And we still don't trust, don't trust, you know, the government, what might happen, we don't know.

In this particular case, the splitting of her 'private Russia' into that which is threatening and needs to be expelled, and that which is retained and idealised has taken the form of a denigration of politics, and a simultaneous romanticisation of traditional Russian culture.

As previously referred to in the Introductory chapter, one of the wider societal phenomena of Russian society mirrors this observation: in public debates on the subject of the country's history and future, Russia is subjected to a similar treatment of discursive splitting. The nation itself is divided into two groups: the uneducated and uncouth masses, and the cultivated, liberal elite which, in the footsteps of the intelligentsia, tends to be in charge of these discussions. This discursive splitting has manifest consequences, once more highlighting the interconnectivity of the two registers:

The theory of the two Russias constructs a veritable ontology of Russian politics, naturalizing differences in ways of life, behaviors, and tastes that otherwise could be critically explained by social and economic conditions

⁵⁰Answer in response to request to provide or describe image which would convey a sense of Russianness (S33). In Russian original: *Мне часто вспоминается сцена из "Андрея Рублева" с пьяным, под дождем, с дубиной в непослушных руках, которой он пытается достать все ускользающих призраков. И смешно, и грустно, и страшно, и немного сочувствуешь: ведь как трезвый - совсем другой человек!*

of various social and strata and their genealogies into “primordial”, eternal qualities, forcing their bearers into an ahistorical and unresolvable confrontation (Matveev, 2014: 188).

The educated elite with its monopoly on cultural, if not monetary capital, is similarly invested in the concept of Russia as a cultural and not political entity, and therefore wholeheartedly subscribes to the ‘theory of the two Russias’. According to Ilya Matveev, Russian intellectuals “comment on politics through the language of culture, thus culturalizing politics” (Matveev, 2014: 191). This absence of a language with which one could meaningfully speak of the body politic is exemplified by empirical examples of representatives of this class being unable to locate, or make sense of themselves in the societal matrix (Chehonadskih, 2014). He goes on to conclude that, problematically, this means that no change can emerge out of a group that continues to see the divide in the country in exclusively cultural terms. This group is thoroughly distrustful of politics and, relatedly, lacks the discursive means to conceptualise how the status quo could be transcended. It often appears unwilling to endow the ‘other Russia’ with a meaningful perspective of its own: “The permanent culture war of the two Russias leaves the majority of the Russian population voiceless and powerless” (Matveev, 2014: 194).

Returning to this and the previous chapter’s aims, that is, an investigation of the interrelation, or intersection between discursive and psychic realms, one might say that the discursive splitting observed in these instances has the structure of a psychic operation, set in motion to manage tensions that threaten to overwhelm subjects, or simply to manage the ambivalence inherent in attachments to the nation. The previous chapter, along with the work of scholars such as Matveev (2014), Chehonadskih (2014) and Oushakine (2001) provide evidence that supports this claim. This observation also links it to the internalisation of, and identification with, images of the nation. If they had no power over subjects, they could not represent a threat that needed to be contained, or, alternatively, would not have the potential to bolster subjects’ egos in the ways that historical and current (see Chapter VII) leader figures have tended to rely on.

For some members of this particular educated and cosmopolitan cohort, the aspiration or real experience of emigration⁵¹ throws up additional poignant questions of how these attachments are affected by the experience of moving to another country, and how they shape existing images of one’s nation of birth. As mentioned in the Introduction and

⁵¹ 9 out of the 34 respondents were living outside of Russia at the time of participation.

further emerging in the previous chapter, for members of the traditionally more Westward-looking Russian intelligentsia, the imagined perspective of the West on Russia is always factored in. As a consequence, not only does Russia always need to live up to the comparison with an imaginary Western Europe and, to some extent, North America, many of the participants' contributions are also framed as conversations with, or statements in response to this imaginary Western audience.

Chapter structure and aims

This chapter will continue the exploration of 'passionate attachments' and (dis)identifications which was commenced in Chapter IV. It is to be treated in conjunction with the analysis of interviews, not only because in many ways the current texts and their analysis represent an attempt to flesh out some of the themes and discursive structures that emerged in the previous chapter. In terms of the voices gathered here, this serves to create a more diverse pool of textual material, due to the greater number and heterogeneity of respondents, leading to an enrichment of already established observations and conclusions. The chapter will therefore return to some of the discursive operations established in Chapter IV. Through the integration of further textual material, it will arrive at greater explanatory force in order to establish further connections between what is observable in discursive practices, what can meaningfully be said about psychic operations, and what remains unknowable.

Along with the previously mentioned splitting into 'good' and 'bad' Russias, other discursive modes of relating to Russia and Russianness noted in the previous chapter include those of a disavowal of knowledge so as to justify one's idealisation, and mythologisation of aspects of the Russian 'national' character. This brings it in line with the Lacanian understanding of the preconditions for activating national identification. One such condition is a promise of 'imaginary' fullness' (entirely fantasmatic) so as to 'animate national desire' (Stavrakakis, 2007: 199). Once in place, a nation's failure to uphold the 'promise for the good life' and thus the inevitable disappointment this entails make love, as a psychic operation closely related to identification (detailed in Chapter II), particularly crucial (Ahmed, 2004)⁵². From the responses, there was a disappointment in

⁵² Note that this trajectory from identification to love is not to be treated in terms of actual temporality, but rather in terms of psychic time, so that this is a movement which can be repeated, revised and reversed.

the nation, as it failed to make itself loveable. A less ambivalent attachment was located in, and projected into the past, with nostalgia providing a safe passage in and out of mourning

This is linked to the second condition, namely the upholding of a narrative of the 'Golden Age'. In the interviewees' case, this meant locating this time of untarnished glory further and further in the past: from before the Revolution, to prior to the enthronement of Peter the Great, to, in Natasha's case, a time before Ivan the Terrible. The fundamental contradiction or tension here is that each of these conditions of possibility of national identification is in principle fulfilled, or referred to, in the interviews, while there are simultaneously indications of a strong desire to disidentify with the nation. A partial explanation provided by respondents is that the impossibility of leading a good life in Russia is conditioned by the Russian national character, so that at the heart of Russianness lies both the potential for a more spiritual, liberated form of existence, as well as the impossibility of its realisation. This links it to the trope of the 'Russian soul', which has haunted Russian cultural and philosophical discourse for centuries (see also Introduction).

This is especially curious as conventional accounts for why the nation fails to deliver on its promise frequently rely on an Other or others who are held responsible for the non-attainment of the full enjoyment and national unity to which its subjects feel entitled. These others - in their role as antagonistic forces through which we are simultaneously able to recognise our identity, via our difference to them - then serve as retroactive grounds that justify one's initial investment in the nation (Ahmed, 2004). It appears that in the case of the educated middle class in post-soviet Russia, one of the narratives that detail why Russia fails to live up to its promise is in fact placing the blame on Russians themselves. This troubles the traditional antagonism between a national in- and outside, as demarcated by its borders. Instead, the source of the antagonism is found within the nation's core. In more popular discursive terms, the saying "Every country has the government it deserves"⁵³, which is commonly used in Russia in explanation for its government's corruption and authoritarianism, is illustrative of this conviction. However, how far the speakers include themselves in such pronouncements, that is, whether they

⁵³ For example S15.

assume subject positions that exclude them from this responsibility, and how this split affects subjectivities, will also be explored in the following sections.

Conditions of Russianness

The survey's first question asked respondents to think through the requirements of becoming Russian (*What does it take to become Russian?*) The question was left deliberately open-ended so as to allow for a number of interpretations. However, it does seem to already presuppose that citizenship goes beyond a formal relationship with the state, and most respondents similarly subscribed to this notion. What emerged in their responses was that the formal fulfilment of conditions such as obtainment of a Russian passport is only the first hurdle to jump. In fact, being Russian appears to require work – both immaterial labour, such as 'loving the country', and a performative enactment that would serve to demonstrate this affective investment. It entails knowledge of Russian history and culture, as well as for the Russian subject to subscribe to certain national myths, such as the centrality of the 'Great Patriotic War' (WWII) in forming national identity. In some definitions it asks of the 'affective citizen' to embody a set of qualities reminiscent of those ascribed to the Russian Soul, such as selflessness and spirituality. Together with the prescribed love for Russia, the 'affective citizenship' circumscribed here makes demands on the body to perform and enact this investment in the nation. The following examples illustrate these tendencies, which anticipate some of the chapter's central motifs:

[...] if one talks about qualities that distinguish truly Russian people, than it is of course love for one's motherland (one especially wants to foster this in one's children; when you read books about the Great Patriotic War, about people's heroic deeds, for whom defending the motherland was more important than protecting their own life). (S5⁵⁴)

**

In order to become Russian you have to love both Russia and its inhabitants selflessly. And to fight selflessly for the humanist ideals of justice and kindness. And also fearlessness – a disdain of personal gain and self-preservation. (S18)

**

One needs to know Russian and the most important events in Russian history. Well, and of course work for the benefit of Russia – one can have been born somewhere else. (S19)

Being Russian is presented as both arbitrary, a consequence of where one happens to have been born, as well as a kind of achievement, as one has to work towards it.

⁵⁴ For more detailed sociodemographic information about the survey respondents, see Appendix H.

However, there are also those respondents that link this kind of ‘affective citizenship’ to cultural factors that predispose one to Russianness, or to a rejection of it:

How to become Russian? Depends on the person. A Tadjik, for instance, cannot ever become Russian, and as for an American or Frenchman: why would they? There is a good expression: “a hunchback is straightened out by the grave.”(S7)

The meaning of this proverb is that character cannot be changed at will. The contrasting sides of the spectrum set up here are between East (Tadjik) and West (France), with Russia as located somewhere in-between. It is implied that one culture cannot assume Russian citizenship (in the meaning just alluded to), while for another culture it would be unreasonable to want this. This response also speaks of Russia’s symbolic location between East and West. At the same time, a simile is made between a burden or impairment such as a ‘hunch’, and Russianness – an uncomfortable trait one is born with and has to manage for the rest of one’s life.

When prompted to describe what exactly this feeling of Russianness entails (*Try to think of a moment or incident that made you feel especially Russian.*), putting this sensation into discourse proved more problematic:

Did you ever feel that you were particularly wet? You can either consider yourself Russian, or not. You cannot be a little bit pregnant. (S11)

This response indicates that ‘Russianness’ is not a matter of nuance, but rather a fact which either applies to oneself, or does not. As one’s subjective, visceral or cerebral experience of Russianness does not alter its presence or absence; no real utility is attributed to posing the question. This reading of it is confirmed by a later comment in which the respondent insists that one is yet to discover the nature of national identity, and that attempts to do so are futile. Indeed, most respondents would most likely have similarly struggled or refused to engage had the question in fact been simply what it feels like to be Russian. However, by encouraging a narrative approach to answering the question, that is, encouraging participants to identify and then elaborate on a moment that evoked a sense of national belonging, the survey attempted to circumvent this impasse.

Delegation

One typical occasion of feeling Russian referred to in the previous chapter is a large sports event:

I feel Russian and at the same time proud when our sportsmen win medals. (S23)

Globally, such types of events are well known to evoke feelings of national pride, even in those who do not profess to them in everyday life (Sullivan, 2009; Sullivan, 2014). Events like the Olympics and the Football World Cup frequently attract a strong measure of criticism for their cost, the inequalities they can perpetuate, or the cynicism they might inspire when talking about their supposed meaning for the national body. Nevertheless, for the duration of the event they frequently achieve, albeit briefly, to rally the national public behind their cause. Governments often try to co-opt this intensity of feeling, namely the oft-cited ‘pride’ experienced when members of one’s national team are successful, and to transfer these onto, and connect them to other national projects, in an extreme form even legitimising the state internationally⁵⁵.

Many respondents expressed the sense that membership of one’s nation, that is, one’s ‘affective citizenship’, becomes activated through either very positive, or very negative experiences:

There are many incidents, but all of them can be divided into 2 clear categories: 1. when I felt uncomfortable, because I am Russian; 2. when I felt proud for the reason that I am Russian. (S24)

Indeed, for many participants, the former category appeared to predominate:

Currently, to my regret, I sometimes feel ashamed to be Russian, because contemporary Russia does not have culture, kindness or compassion. Instead, there is rudeness, drunkenness and hopelessness. Doctors that do not heal but cripple. Airplanes that make one scared to fly. It is frightening to walk along the street, because one can end up falling through a sewer cover or into a canal rotten with age. (S23)

**

⁵⁵ The 1938 Munich Olympic Games are some of the most notorious examples, but to a lesser degree this also applied to the 2014 Sochi Olympics (comments in preceding chapter.)

I practically never think about this. Only when friends visit me from the West and see the horrible tarmac, dirt and all that. I start feeling ashamed and remember that I am Russian (S34).

**

Fortunately, never, because for me this is actually a negative concept (don't get me wrong, I am a patriot of Russia, but the word 'Russians' rather makes me think of cattle and certainly does not include the class of intelligentsia). (S20)

**

Well, not myself...but I did feel others to be Russian. (S15)

This is a telling response for this particular cohort. Importantly, the final quote follows the account of an incident during which the respondent experienced aggression and then inexplicably – and in short succession - kindness from the very same individuals. This is in line with the cliché of inconsistency or contradiction that is frequently employed when talking about Russia. At the same time, when referring to the negative qualities of Russians, the respondents themselves are usually excluded from such pronouncements.

While not specific to relationships with Russianness, these quotes point to a form of identification being in place despite an overt denial, or to a situation where the subject can switch between two seemingly opposite poles of rejection and strong ‘moments of Russianness’, such as in the example of sporting victories cited above and in the previous chapter. Derek Hook refers to such cases as “affective (non)commitment” (Hook, 2014):

Not only may someone else believe or feel for me – the unconscious here being in effect another person – their state of belief or affect can be a condition of possibility for me to extend a latent belief or affect into an actually realised form. (Hook, 2014: 139)

This form of delegation enables its practitioners to locate a form of identification in others when it is not possible to openly avow such attachments in oneself. At times, and considering the many ‘shameful’ aspects of Russian past and present, this location of Russianness (or with its identification) in others may indeed not always be the result of splitting, as explicated in the preceding chapter. In fact, rather than splitting off the unpalatable aspects so as to rid oneself of them, their delegation to other subjects, that is, the idea that others find these aspects more tolerable and, by extension, loveable, may

enable the subject to hold on to them, thereby becoming an indication of a latent form of identification. In Judith Butler's words: "a radical refusal to identify with a given position suggests that on some level an identification has already taken place, an identification that is made and disavowed" (Butler, 1993:113). The negative or cynical attitude to one's nation and national signifiers can thus in some instances be read as an overt disidentification, underneath which a latent form of identification continues to exist, though this is perhaps not evident as such in subjects' consciousness. Indeed, if a straightforward identification would prove too injurious to the ego, then this enables the subject to retain a form of attachment to the nation. If Russianness exists in others without the degree of doubt experienced by the participants, then the possibility of identification is kept alive in them, and one is able to jump to the nation's defence without an admission of one's own affective involvement. At the same time, this type of relationship is characterised by numerous tensions and self-loathing, opening up a series of questions of their consequences, or rather, how subjects manage these tensions. They are addressed directly, or at times more implicitly, throughout this thesis.

Indeed, the act of splitting seems to avoid some of the pitfalls of the delegation of Russianness in other subjects, with all the paradoxical moves between identification and denial thereof these entail. Situating it in the realm of culture, as evident in the interview responses, enables a more straightforward articulation of what it is one holds dear:

I don't know if this reply can be counted as a response to this point...once I was walking along the street with a foreigner, and as we walked past a church he asked: 'What is this old thing there?' I replied, that this is actually a church, and that is it indeed very old. When I offered to go inside and take a look he declined. I don't know what troubled me more: the lack of interest in another (our) culture, or, even worse, the lack of respect for it. (S9)

This contribution implies that the abstract notion of culture, that is, what the correspondent holds it to be, contains some precious substance or essence. The respondent experiences injury on behalf of this substance, finding herself in a position of wanting to defend it by demonstrating its worth. Thus, while the recounted experience has initially negative connotations, its side effects are positive: the respondent is not only not ashamed of Russia; she has been handed the opportunity of defending it. The fact that she finds herself connecting with Russianness over a religious edifice is not accidental: just like the discourse of the 'Russian Soul' which endows Russians with

distinct psychic and spiritual features, it is often religious symbolism which is associated with a Russia or 'motherland' that contains elements of purity or goodness. Such an instance of affirmation of attachment or love for the nation was mostly strikingly evident in the following contribution:

1. *One incident - a meeting. I met a very good man, a clever journalist and poet who frequently repeated, even in the simplest and most unremarkable conversation, the words of Apostle Paul on love ("If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal...[...]"⁵⁶). He didn't just repeat the words in order to show off his erudition, he LIVED them. At his home there was chaos, frequent arguments and lack of understanding, but he bore it all, loving everyone, expressing his gratitude for many things....It took 10 years for me to understand, that this is where this person saw this very 'mysterious' (but actually simple and bright) Russian soul. Through wishing to reach a communion with this SOUL I began to understand my Russianness...(S30)*

This being one of the lengthiest contributions, it provides a narrative full of romantic and romanticised notions of Russianness. From the manner in which it is framed, the text tells the story of a retroactive type of attribution, adhering to the following arc: a) the respondent encounters a remarkable person, perhaps an important influence on her, b) he is Russian, c) he is religious, or these religious notions were important to him and he took them to be expressions of the Russian soul, and d) in retrospect ('10 years') Russianness has become associated with these words as enunciated by or through him. As is especially apparent in the response's final sentence, it is by associating his charisma and kindness with an idealised notion of what it means to be Russian retroactively that she comes to see her own identity in a positive light. In this retroactive attribution, there is thus a clear element of choice. In contrast to earlier contributions, rather than expel what is unpalatable through splitting, or delegate what is not in line with one's self-representation (that is, not serving one's ego), this respondent chooses to identify with a certain configuration of Russianness.

As touched upon in the introduction, religious signifiers are readily available in contemporary Russian discourses. More recently, the government has sought to strengthen official ties with the Orthodox Church, to which in turn the Church has been rather receptive⁵⁷. Indeed, an association with Russian orthodoxy can be seen as a 'purifying move' - a sense of spirituality and a signalling of one's aspiration towards higher, non-material

⁵⁶From Letter to the Corinthians.

⁵⁷ More on this in the next chapter.

values. The discourse of the Russian Soul, with its mainly literary and philosophical connotations, is merged with an aura of impeccability that the Church was endowed with, having been unblemished by participation in official life following the policy of state atheism in the Soviet Union, and the repression experienced to varying degrees by members of the clergy at the time. Additionally, a connection to the church harks back to a pre-Soviet, imperial past⁵⁸ - an idea in which both Church and state appear to be invested.

While the seductive qualities of amalgamating religious and national signifiers in the context of Russia have been established, the psychosocial researcher would ask what kind of psychic adjustments need to be made, or what it is that needs to be disavowed in order to enable this love for the nation, as such an outcome is clearly not available to everyone. In the words of Mladen Dolar, what occurs in the above contribution is that “[t]he contingent circumstances of one's birth are transformed into an object of love” (Dolar, 1993:82) – with religion and spirituality here acting as mediator enabling this fusion. In this definition, being truly Russian means loving Russia – it is in the act of loving that one acquires true, spiritual citizenship. This is, of course, a retroactive move: love comes first (and is borne out of a ‘forced choice’), and in the act of trying to justify this love certain characteristics are assigned to the nation. In the case of Russia, a natural origin is that of Orthodox Christian liturgy, and the kind of spiritual love (or *agape*) it promotes. However, at the same time it serves one well to remember here that while the cultural history of Russia is certainly strongly influenced by its Christian heritage, a respondent wishing to justify why Russianness can be attained through cruelty would have found equally ‘valid’ evidence – as is true of all nations, though this would naturally be less ego boosting.

Frequently, an other is named to account for a nation's failure to live up to its promise, that is, for having stolen the nation's ‘enjoyment’. Blame is allocated to a class or group (usually an ethnic minority) who is identified as the source of a nation's troubles, the paradigmatic case being that of the alleged Jewish-Bolshevik plot in the Weimar Republic. What is unusual about the responses gathered in this and the previous chapter is not so much the near-absence of overt racism or blame games - in an educated, liberal demographic this would have most likely been considered *de mauvais ton* – but the fact that the responsibility for the nation's historic and present iniquities is seen to lie with

⁵⁸ See for example the canonisation of members of the Romanov Dynasty.

Russians themselves⁵⁹. This accounts for the self-loathing and ambivalence so often cited in relation to respondents' Russianness. Indeed, by 2014 for large parts of the Russian public the resulting sense of inferiority and internal antagonism seems to have found a more traditional outlet, namely by turning these tensions outward, as well as retrieving the coveted 'lost object' of Crimea, the enjoyment of which Russians have been deprived⁶⁰. If, as Sara Ahmed claims, disappointment in the nation's failure to live up to its promises can in fact prompt further attachments (Ahmed, 2004, see chapter II), in the case of Russia this has given rise to a particularly fraught relationship among the participants. It can be positively experienced in mass events, which temporarily and collectively enable its affirmation. It can also be delegated to others, retained through a process of splitting, or, as indicated in the most recent section, held on to through a retroactive attribution of certain signifiers to Russianness.

According to Slavoj Žižek, belief may well be delegated to others, but the centre of such a belief structure needs to contain the national 'Thing':

Members of a community who partake in a given "way of life" believe in their Thing, where this belief has a reflexive structure proper to the intersubjective space: "I believe in the (national) Thing" equals "believe that others (member of my community) believe in the Thing." The tautological character of the Thing – its semantic void which limits what we can say about the Thing to "It is the real Thing," etc.- is founded precisely in this paradoxical reflexive structure. The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself. (Žižek, 1993:111)

As detailed in the introduction, contemporary Russia does not appear to have contributed to the shape of Russia's national 'Thing' due its arrested discursive field, with merely a fear of return to the chaotic 1990s as a form of presence in absence adding a current of anxiety. The next section explores which images are recruited instead in order to anchor a sense of Russianness.

Images of nature

While it is assumed that every culture has a repository or pool of images that come to represent the nation, existing literature on contemporary Russia suggests that Russia presents a somewhat special case, in that an absence of newer, post-Soviet signifiers

⁵⁹ In a variation it is the fact that the Bolsheviks killed off the 'glory' or better part of the country that is used as an explanation.

⁶⁰ More on this in the Conclusion.

(Oushakine, Prozorov) is posited alongside a profound split in society that has led to almost separate discursive realms (Matveev, Zubarevich). The survey question ‘*Can you list a number of items (objects, sensations) that consider to be truly Russian?*’ sought to investigate whether there is a recurrence of specific images among the respondents’ sample, and more importantly, which function these serve. Not surprisingly considering their overlap in terms of sociocultural background, contributions from survey respondents echoed facets of Russianness alluded to by the interview participants. For the survey’s participants, key symbols and reference points include characters and scenes from Russian literature, the victory and sacrifices of World War II (or the ‘Great Patriotic War’), the cultural output of pre-revolutionary Russia, the abovementioned religious imagery, as well as images of the Russian countryside:

The Volga river, vodka, birch trees...because we grew up with this. (S3)

**

Frost, Kremlin, winter, bliny, Butter Week⁶¹, nature, beauty, forest, spirituality [...]. (S6)

At the same time, not everyone subscribed to the idea of there being ‘inherently Russian’ signifiers, going as far as rejecting any easy internalisation of symbols of the nation, past or present:

There is no such image. Everything is banal – tanks, airplanes, drunkards, devastation in the provinces, grandmothers, priests in churches, Bentleys and Ferraris, bandits and cops, pitiful little soldiers and hazing, hallways that smell of piss, country cottages and sovkhozy⁶² that are falling apart. (S25)

The rejection of these images here indicates a refusal of the question, that is, the request to provide images that do or could epitomise the nation. At the same time, the selection provided speaks of a second kind of rejection: that of the nation itself, because of its failure to provide moments worthy of being cited here. Other respondents coupled this with a very modern sensitivity to the inauthenticity of symbols, highlighting the accidental, arbitrary nature of one’s place of birth, thereby relating it to the ‘passionate attachments’ referred to earlier in this chapter:

⁶¹ Or ‘maslenitsa’ (масленица), a religious and folk holiday celebrated during the week before Great Lent.

⁶² State-owned farms dating back to the Soviet era.

I tried to put together a list of objects, and it featured the standard birches, satellites, combine harvesters [...] That seemed banal. [...] There is no point in listing them. In this sense different people share everything if we take into account that we have wide-open spaces and forests, whereas others have deserts and the jungle. Everything depends on who was born where. As they say: you don't choose your motherland. (S2)

This links it to one of the integral demands of identification outlined in chapter II: if to identify requires the ability to represent, then this representation only ever succeeds to a certain degree. It is the failure to represent and subsequently assume a signifier in its entirety that may provide one of the important motivations behind further identifications in adulthood, as well as behind the continuous operations of metaphor and metonymy in Lacanian thought:

[...] human construction is never able to institute itself as a closed and self-contained order. There is always something which frustrates all efforts to reach an exhaustive representation of the world – whether natural or social. (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003:132)

As the images cited are frequently clichéd, one may be justified in asking whether this response to the question represents a kind of ‘acting out’, that is, a playful challenging of the question, or whether this is a consequence of having to operate within the confines of existing discourses – be they word-representations or images. For some respondents, one way of escaping these constraints is to describe these sensations using the fragmented language of dreams:

A feeling of carefreeness, [...] Objects: the broken door of a cold hallway – a village road: a magnificent landscape and impassable dirt under one's feet. (I cannot explain it.) (S16)

**

The sensation of awakening - when a dream begins to fade and reality is perceived through a waking dream – the state between sleeping and being fully awake. (S18)

What comes to the fore here is the dream-like nature of these associations. They represent an acknowledgement of the difficulties of conveying in language what appears to exist to outside of it, instead opting for a series of images and scenes. At the same time, both contributions are reminiscent of the cinematic language employed by influential Soviet filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky. He was evoked directly by participant S33, whose contribution gave the current chapter its title. However, this may not be entirely accidental. Rather, it could point to the interrelation of cinema and

psychoanalysis, that is, their contemporaneous emergence and mutual reliance on the language of dreams. In the films of Tarkovsky, and *The Mirror* (1975) in particular, time and memory emerge as mutually dependent, or closely intertwined (Bloom, 2009; Botz-Bornstein, 2007; Žižek, 1999), so that the poetic language of *Mirror* becomes at the same time both intimate and universal, that is, individual enough to represent the respondents' feelings while able to encompass a sense of Russianness away from more clichéd symbols of nationhood.

Similarly, the responses to the pictures forming the latter part of the survey (see Appendix G) were indicative of resisting too close an association with national emblems such as Russian dolls or Vladimir Putin, especially when imposed from the outside. After all, the symbolism pertaining to nationhood often consists of clichés. Responses can therefore be situated both in modernity, as evident in the doubt in any true meaning behind the sign, and in postmodernity, for instance in the irony and playfulness displayed in the handling of the pictures. However, in the frequent evocations of scenes of nature, the Russian countryside and a rural way of life, this aloofness is replaced by genuine moments of idealisation:

Banya. Snow. Skis. Foraging for mushrooms. Village. Hayloft. That's in the village. There is no such thing in cities. There, you don't understand at all who you are. (S7)

**

In the village there is more Russianness. (S7)

These images are seen to be ingrained in, and formative of national character and identity, as illustrated by interview respondent Andrey's comment:

[...] we have a horizon, it's wider, it's wider. Maybe it's partly geographically, because I believe that geography has some, some, partly impact on people life and in Russia we always have forests after our back, so Russia is a country that is open somewhere, somewhere in the darkness, to the North, to this North forest, so something like this.

Greater authenticity is often believed to be located in the countryside; at times it is portrayed as the sole remaining site of Russianness, because unlike towns and cities it is seen to be less affected by the currents of history. In the Soviet Union of the 1970s, the

least political decade of its history⁶³ (also referred to as *zastoi* or ‘stagnation’), one of the most prevalent literary movements was that of ‘village prose’. It saw many writers who felt increasingly constrained by the artistic tenets of Socialist Realism leaving cities and turning to Russian village life for inspiration and a more authentic, that is, more ‘Russian’ source of material (e.g. V. Pasputin, V. Shukshin, B. Mozhayev). This is not always or necessarily linked to Russia’s natural beauty: in Solzhenitsyn’s *Matrena’s House* or *Матренин двор* (1963), one of the earliest and more famous examples of the genre, the narrator ultimately discovers a truly ‘righteous person’ amidst the poverty and grime of the Russian village.

Indeed, ‘nature’ appears to be one of the most powerful signifiers in the contemporary discursive repertoire of Russia. As referred to above, it can accommodate notions of spirituality and religiosity, ideas of freedom and openness together with a generosity of spirit (“we have a horizon, it’s wider”). At the same time, it can be incorporated into ideas of nationhood, or the more affectively invested variant of ‘motherland’ (see Sandomirskaja, 2003, and exemplified in Solzhenitsyn’s late, openly nationalistic thought). Its very openness enables the integration of personal quirks and aesthetic sensibilities, as documented by Irina’s response in Chapter IV, where the oft-cited spirituality of the Russian countryside becomes transformed into magical properties, allowing her to performatively enact the part of a “magical forest witch” retaining within her “a mysterious, ancient light”. This ability to encompass fantasmatic properties linking to both social and individual fantasy is the key to operations of ‘cathectic’ investment, that is, the element that enables subjects to assume and become invested in a discourse. In short: beyond its size and pristineness, the signifier ‘nature’ is able to contain a vast array of meanings: "Our descriptions do not naturally and immutably refer to things, but - this is the defining feature of the symbolic order - things in retrospect begin to resemble their description" (R. Butler, 2005: 31).

The process of splitting, which has been extensively referred to throughout this and the previous chapter, can also be seen at work in the formation of images of nature. The respondents’ predominantly urban location means that the city becomes symbolic of the everyday or overtly unpleasant aspects of existence, whereas the (often) remote

⁶³ Compare to a similar assessment of the 2000s: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/artemy-troitsky-peter-pomerantsev-oliver-carroll/talking-point-is-culture-new-politics-in->

countryside along with the fact that one returns to it for specific, often recreational or escapist purposes enables its romanticisation:

For me these are all linked with childhood, summer, the forest, the village. I grew up in a city. In the city, if it does contain anything Russian, it's devoid of cheer. In the village of my childhood, on the other hand, everything was full of joy. (S15)

Returning to the 'crisis of investiture' of modernity, and how it makes visible the gap between oneself and existing places or slots in the symbolic matrix, it is precisely by recourse to fantasy that subjects can fill out this gap in interpellation, "just as the 'sublime object' fills out what is missing in the master signifier" (R. Butler, 2005: 57). While fantasy is clearly integral in the elevation of nature as the site of true, unblemished Russianness, it can hardly serve to connect this particular cohort more closely to society. Nature here is not representative of community – in fact, it becomes precious because of its (perceived) removal from contemporaneity. Rather than serving to interpellate this cohort of subjects in the name of community, it provides justification for distancing oneself from it. This is indicative of the 'arrested discursive field' of post-Soviet Russia, which has failed to provide subjects with contemporary instantiations of such images and signifiers tying them to the nation. The suggestion that the figure of Vladimir Putin might serve as a potential master signifier of Russianness, embodying "the king as the place-holder of the void" (Žižek, 2002: 267) will be discussed in the next chapter.

Mythical scenes

This and the previous section speak of the role of images, an aspect of identification that has been alluded to in Chapter IV's discussion of the frequently cited cinematic and literary scenes. Indeed, it appears that by encouraging respondents to define Russianness, the very openness of the question lead to the proliferation of images and symbols being cited. This went hand in hand with an aesthetisation of the past *enabled* by these scenes, and the prelapsarian fantasy that –while these symbols and markers now represent the past, they were at one time more meaningful, and more intrinsically representative of what it means to be Russian. At times, this process also appears to function in reverse, in that the provision of images (see Appendix G) created a multiplicity of affective responses.

The photograph that garnered the most affective, that is, affectionate and positive responses, was the picture featuring pioneers on a 1970s street in the centre of Moscow. This was a photograph introduced to ‘test the waters’ of nostalgia present in this particular cohort. Whereas by and large the other images provided did not engender a personal connection, this picture led to thoughts of:

Our happy Soviet childhood, when there were ideals, friendship and living was joyful. (S23)

Indeed, it appears here that the inclusion of the photograph encouraged a response somewhat reminiscent of Soviet-era propaganda slogans. The same respondent, however, articulated a similar relationship earlier on, when asked to think of moments that felt Russian to her:

As for sensations, those are probably memories from a Soviet childhood spent in Moscow and the Urals, when it was a normal occurrence to help the elderly living nearby, and when subbotniks⁶⁴ were a normal occurrence. There was kindness among people. Though this is not a description of the word Russian, rather of ‘Soviet’. But for me there is no great difference. (S23)

A true sense of Russianness is here buried in the past – similar to the retroactive amalgamation of spirituality and Russianness observed earlier. Meaningful experiences for the respondent (now looked upon with all the trappings of nostalgic reminiscence) are conflated with what Russia could embody because of an expectation that the association must be positive. This discursive and psychic operation is not performed consciously. In order to enable this attachment, or rather, to imbue at least certain aspects with unambiguously positive overtones, a degree of disavowal is necessary⁶⁵. For younger participants, this specifically means a disavowal of knowledge in order to allow access to certain favourable associations:

The only knowledge I have of pioneer organisations is through books and my mum’s stories. That’s why it’s hard to form an objective opinion. It must have been great. (S5)

The way the past is referred to in these responses is reminiscent of the psychoanalytic notion of *Nachträglichkeit* or, ‘afterwardsness’, whereby:

⁶⁴ Official days of ‘volunteer work’ in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

⁶⁵ See also the instances of disavowal in Chapter IV.

[...] every new experience potentially leads to a restructuring of the psyche, so that new memories and experiences can give new meanings to the past – not too dissimilar to the way history is continuously reworked in historiography (List, 2009: 114).

The past, or rather, one's recollection of it, is compared with the present, which, especially for the nostalgic, is inevitably found lacking. In Russia, the difficulties of the post-Soviet period are thus contrasted with what preceded them. In Stephen Frosh's words, this operation can be understood "as the reinvention of the past in the light not only of the present, but also of the future – of what we might hope or fear to become" (Frosh, 2013: 54). This element of revising the past also connects it to a need for quasi-mythological narratives positing the existence of a Golden Age. Myths can serve as points of historical identification, positioning subjects in the symbolic matrix and providing the ego ideals after which they can model themselves. For this cohort, one mythical reference point already mentioned is the Second World War. Another, equally prevalent narrative is that of true Russianness having had its apogee before the Revolution, and of then having been lost with it. This moment in time is perhaps more pertinent for the current sample of respondents, as the pre-revolutionary period is also what is often associated with the Russian intelligentsia's brightest and most influential epoch – an additional identificatory element for many:

With 'Russian' I associate the Russian intelligentsia which left Russia before the Revolution. (S23)

**

It was only until 1917 that Russians still had a full sense of personal dignity, independence and acknowledgement of their civil rights. (S3)

**

Now for me this is more of a negative term. I am sure it wasn't like this in the 19th century⁶⁶. (S20)

According to Frosh, such narratives contain inherent dangers, in that they can lead to an eventual clamouring for a return of the lost object:

[...] in imagining the existence of a lost object that can or must be 'recovered', a mythology is created that has a number of potentially nefarious effects. It is, by definition, backward-looking to a supposed time

⁶⁶ In response to the request to define Russianness, MB.

when there was a pure culture of the now-oppressed, a kind of romance of origin that can be called on to establish the distinctiveness and perhaps purity to which the group can return (Frosh, 2013:59)

And while the perils of constructing a societal narrative based on such a “romance of origin” are evident in historical precedents, for the respondents it has resulted mainly in a situation of withdrawal and social paralysis. As mentioned in the introduction, the cause for this is assigned to the prolonged disruption of the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The utility of this discourse of ‘trauma’ as a way of reading a nation’s present has been challenged (Berlant, 2011), among other reasons because it would potentially enable the social researcher to interpret any major change or transition in terms of a societal trauma. However, the multiple devastations of the 1990s in Russia certainly correspond more closely to this definition – at the very least, they resulted in a time of material deprivation for many, as well as a series of - often involuntary - personal and societal changes, coupled with a sense of disorientation. The insistence on certain mythological narratives can thus be understood as “attempts to make sense of contingent and perhaps traumatic sets of events by means of a narrative” (Leader, 2003: 36). The deprivations and injustices of the 1990s acquire meaning and even hope if it is posited that things were different once. While for some respondents, this sense-making process means this starting “out with “an individual myth” made up of elements drawn from his or her past” (Leader, 2003: 38), such as in participant Irina’s imaginary existence as a ‘magical forest witch’, most of these myths have attained a degree of consistency. Not only do such myths ensure a continued belief in the existence of the ‘national Thing’, Slavoj Žižek also argues that reality itself can only be read and understood through the lens of fiction:

The fundamental paradox of symbolic fictions is therefore that, in one and the same move, they bring about the "loss of reality" and provide the only possible access to reality: true, fictions are a semblance which occludes reality, but if we renounce fictions, reality itself dissolves (Žižek, 1993: 90)

However, beyond providing a map that provides coordinates to an otherwise incoherent and confusing existence, myths harbour the power to mobilise subjects, for example in quests to recover the lost national object.

In chapter IV, Andrey describes Russia's past in the following manner: "And actually, the great part of Russian history is just a loss of these opportunities". The story of the nation, and of Russia in particular, thus becomes a story of loss. Not the loss of an actual country, though for those who have experienced emigration this may apply, but the loss of an *ideal* Russia. While one cannot disregard the actual deprivations and tensions of life in contemporary Russia, holding up this version of an ideal and idealised Russia in one's psyche may entail a state of constant mourning. Additionally, it can also make subjects prey to strategies of overcoming, or compensating for this loss. Suffering the loss of an ideal and its subsequent mourning can in fact lead to a sense of triumph and omnipotence over the lost object – in other words, a 'narcissistic satisfaction' emerging from the fact that the ego has managed to sever attachment to it. In reference to a point made by Melanie Klein on the process of mourning, Gail Lewis observes that:

One of the ways in which hatred expresses itself in the situation of mourning is in feelings of triumph over the dead person [lost object]....In my experience, feelings of triumph are inevitably bound up even with normal mourning, and have the effect of retarding the work of mourning...In my view, this 'narcissistic satisfaction' [when ego severs attachment to lost object] contains ...the triumph. (Lewis, 2010: 15)

'Feelings of triumph' not only account for the sense of haughty detachment or revulsion that some Russians express in relation to their country of birth, it also reveals that a revelling in these feelings of superiority can serve to extend the 'work of mourning'. More importantly, when the challenge of coming to terms with loss is not mastered, they might be projected onto the other, or become subject to compensatory behaviour (Treacher Kabesh, 2013), such as when others are recruited to account for the 'theft of enjoyment'. Finally, when the process of mourning is disrupted entirely or never takes place, a situation of melancholic or regressive identification can occur, whereby the nation's gaze is forever turned back in celebration of past glories. However, rather than insist on past greatness, the interview and survey participants appeared fixated upon, or resigned to, moments of loss, which prevented the nation from ever reaching its full potential. If blame was allocated, then to an internal other, leading to a narrative in which Russians themselves provided obstacles to reaching enjoyment. Following Berlant, this and the previous chapter can therefore also be regarded as contributions to the study of 'attrition of fantasy' – the fantasy here being that of the nation, by cataloguing "cases of adjustment to the loss of this fantasy" (Berlant, 2011: 11).

Conclusion

*I certainly despise my fatherland from top to bottom but it annoys me when this sentiment is shared by a foreigner. (A.S.Pushkin)*⁶⁷

The findings of chapters IV and V portray a disaffected group that sees itself as being situated outside the symbolic confines of Russian society. Importantly, this observation applies across the distinctions between emigrants and those who have remained on Russian soil. Processes of disavowal and splitting continue to manifest themselves in order to enable the 'acquisition' of affective citizenship. In the present case, the splitting into two different Russias can enable subjects to withdraw from political actuality whilst retaining an affiliation to an imagined Russia. This state is enabled by the absence of a language or discourse to qualify their position within the political matrix of contemporary Russia. There is thus frequent disparagement of Russianness in its contemporary manifestations, which exists alongside a romanticisation of an ideal, or spiritual Russianness, when the existence of such is not denied outright. In other instances, identification with Russianness is delegated to others, who continue to believe in the nation, as it is, on behalf of the subject. When not experienced in certain powerful moment of collective enjoyment, such as mass events, identification often remains latent, only becoming activated when the subjects feel required to jump to the nation's defense. Nature emerges as a powerful signifier able to attract and amalgamate a whole series of meanings ranging from spirituality to authenticity and freedom. Crucially, however, as such it is not able to interpellate subjects on behalf of society, as it is partially sought out due to being untarnished by history and politics.

The survey resulted in a multitude of images, with descriptions at times taking on cinematic qualities when not outright inspired by films, as evident in the title quote. In part this proliferation was prompted by the survey format, however, it also represents a strategy to circumvent the limits of textual discourse. At the same time, nostalgic images serve as powerful stores of ambiguous identifications and positive affect. Certain mythological narratives are recruited to make sense of what happened to the nation's potential (the October Revolution), and when it last appeared at its greatest (the Second World War). Respondents seem engaged in a collective process of mourning the loss of

⁶⁷ In the original: "Я, конечно, презираю отечество мое с головы до ног — но мне досадно, если иностранец разделяет со мною это чувство." (А. С. Пушкин, из письма Вяземскому П. А. , 27 мая 1826 г.)

an ideal Russia, which is at times coupled with a sense of triumph at having overcome any overt attachment to Russianness. The next chapter examines how these latent attachments to the national Thing become activated in the public discourses surrounding the performance and subsequent arrest of Pussy Riot.

Chapter VI: 'Velvet Revolution' or 'Frenzied Uteri' – Making sense of Pussy Riot

The outrage surrounding Pussy Riot's performance in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and subsequent protests to their prison sentences appear to run counter to the idea that it is impossible to encourage Russians to position themselves vis-à-vis the nation in its contemporary form, or to engage in a debate at the heart of which are national sensibilities. As referred to in the introduction, existing literature on post-Soviet Russia frequently claims that at the heart of the nation lies an absence of symbolic functions or subjective formations with which Russians could identify. However, the emotional response to the group's 'punk prayer' indicates that a collective nerve had been hit.

Affect is therefore an integral component, as it can be regarded as both a distinguishing feature of the reactions, but also as the initial phenomenon that sets in motion the working of collective defence mechanisms. By examining the "discursive inscription of the affective dimension" (Stavrakakis, 2007), that is, the different positions, patterns and interrelations that affect assumes within discourse, it becomes possible to gain an understanding of the ways in which Russia desires, or fears, to see itself. This also requires a pinpointing of the moments that prove anxiety-provoking, as a collective rejection or disavowal of these might similarly assist in an examination of the connection between the social and libidinal links that underpin the community. Taking a close look at Russian media discourses surrounding 'Pussygate', this chapter represents the first of two case studies of public discourses. The analysis suggest that in their rejection or championing of the group's performance, participants in the debate have found ways of both shifting the threat Pussy Riot represents, and of once again 'enjoying the nation'.

The events and their aftermath

In February 2012, 5 members of Russian feminist punk rock group or 'collective' Pussy Riot entered the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, crossed themselves in front of the altar and started singing a 'punk prayer', invoking the Mother of God to become a feminist, to "chase Putin away" and calling Patriarch Kirill a 'bitch' (*suka*). The action was filmed, and later a clip of it was placed on *YouTube*, underlain with a studio recording of the song performed at the cathedral⁶⁸. Criminal proceedings against the group commenced shortly thereafter, and in March members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and

⁶⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPDkJbTQRCY>

Maria Alekhina were arrested, followed by third member Ekaterina Samutsevich shortly after. Prosecutors accused the women of attempting to ‘incite hatred against the Orthodox church’ and ‘hooliganism’. Initial trial dates for June were later moved to the end of July, and on July 17 the verdict was announced: 2 years in a penal colony for each of the women- one year less than demanded by prosecution. The group of lawyers representing the women appealed the verdict, and after an appellate hearing Ekaterina Samutsevich was released on probation on October 10. The formal grounds for her release were her non-participation in the ‘punk prayer’, as she had been detained outside the church before the performance began. 2 weeks later Alekhina and Tolokonnikova were sent to penal colonies in Perm and Mordovia, respectively, where they spent 21 months sewing uniforms for members of the Russian military. Tolokonnikova and Alekhina were released on 23. December 2013 after Vladimir Putin had granted a series of amnesties to political prisoners, including businessman Mikhail Khodorkovsky, to tie in with the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi.

Making Sense

What rhetoric can explain is the form that an overdetermining investment takes, but not the force that explains the investment as such and its perdurability. Here something else has to be brought into the picture. Any overdetermination requires not only metaphorical condensations but also cathectic investments. That is, something belonging to the order of affect has a primary role in discursively constructing the social. Freud already knew it: the social link is a libidinal link. (Laclau, 2004: 326, emphasis in original)

National and international reactions to the case range from discomfort to outrage and disgust, especially nationally, and at the other end of the spectrum, from support to unbridled excitement, especially internationally. In order to understand the strong responses that have accompanied the case from supporters and opponents of Pussy Riot, one need look beyond the abovementioned chain of events. Questions that venture into the origins of the visceral responses to Pussy Riot have to identify potential sources of the public outrage, and to ask what kind of images of the nation emerge in the repudiation or support of the group’s actions. The ‘sense’ at which Russian commentators arrive does not come out of nowhere – it seems rather that the case helped touch a (public) nerve or tension which was already partially exposed, but required a certain kind of prodding - to stretch the metaphor - in order to arrive at a point where it resulted in a collective reaction, verbal or otherwise. Even a cursory

examination therefore reveals that the case helped to transform latent tensions into ones that could be manifested in discourse. Reactions to the case indicate not only an affective investment in the discourses they produce, or rather, in the moments of their production and proliferation. They also appear to share certain structural similarities with psychic defense mechanisms.

The ‘making sense’ of this chapter’s title therefore refers to two things: firstly, the ways in which everything from the group’s name to the motivation behind their performance has been subjected to intense scrutiny in Russia, and how one’s choice of interpretation reveals attachments or repudiations of a specific vision of Russia and Russianness. Secondly, the excessive production of rhetoric that accompanied the case, and the multiplicity of meanings condensed into these discourses, invite a reading that uses some of the conceptual tools of psychoanalysis. Using them, one may be able explore ‘the condensations and displacements that punctuate the signifying chain’ (Lapping, 2012:74) to infer some of the force that drives them into existence. In Claudia Lapping’s understanding, this kind of analysis, which – like the analysis of dreams - pays attention to the symbolic relations between discursive elements, “makes it possible to explore the relations between dispersed instances of data as constitutive of a complex web that condenses meanings and displaces psychical intensities across chains of signifiers” (ibid., p.75). Finally, in order to locate the discourses surrounding Pussy Riot within a wider set of discourses about Russia, and identification with Russianness, the current analysis will also pay attention to the particular historical and social origins of the language that is operationalised (Gusejnov, 2012).

Context

With an awareness of existing accounts of the troubled or apathetic nature of Russians’ attachment to the nation, one may be tempted to ask whether the vehement reaction to the case means we need to revise what was previously said about the void at the heart of ‘Russianness’, the absence of “clearly defined positions and functions with which the post-Soviet subject could identify” (Oushakine, 2000: 1011)? Has the “vacuum”⁶⁹ of values and beliefs created by the collapse of the Soviet Union, finally been filled? Or, alternatively, do these discourses of rejection suggest one dealt with a type of suspension of discourses of investment, that is, a phenomenon of delay and suspension rather than

⁶⁹ Mentioned for example in Gathmann, M. “Lady Suppenhuhn”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* online, 25.08.2012

simply one of absence? This would tie in with the latent type of identification discussed in Chapter V.

The surge in public protests and demonstrations since parliamentary elections in 2011 would certainly support this claim. Russia appeared to be in a state of crisis - a crisis that differed in a number of aspects from the perpetual crisis in which it had found itself since the end of the Soviet Union. Since Putin's ascent to power, there had been a semblance of stability - even the economic crisis of 2008 did not appear to immediately shake Russia to its economic or political foundations. Importantly, his government has largely relied on the public's non-engagement with politics, an almost complete withdrawal from the public sphere that resembles that of the pre-*perestroika* Soviet Union (Yurchak, 2005). What has therefore been posited as the absence of national identification in Russia has played into the hands of the ruling elite, in whose interests it was to support and enhance this tendency, making the 2000s "the least political moment of modern Russian history"⁷⁰.

More recently however, important authoritarian institutions displayed a fear of losing their grip on power. Both government and the (Russian Orthodox) Church, as two examples of the country's strongest authorities - who are incidentally making ever more moves to come closer together -, demonstrated their apprehension about losing influence. Their extreme reaction to Pussy Riot's performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was just one case in point:

When authority is waning, the temptation is often to show force. Repression is always an option; deterrence works. Russia has not experienced such fierce repression since the darkest days of Brezhnev in the 1970s.⁷¹

A more relevant consideration for an analysis of 'Pussygate'⁷² is how that emerging failure on behalf of the authorities to believe in the integrity or solidity of their structures has affected Russians. If apparent to observers outside the inner circle of power, it seems apt to assume that this must have had an effect on Russian society as a whole.

⁷⁰ <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/artemy-troitsky-peter-pomerantsev-oliver-carroll/talking-point-is-culture-new-politics-in->

⁷¹ <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/marie-mendras/back-to-no-future>

⁷² As the case was occasionally – and jokingly – referred to in the Russian press.

Theoretical framework

A psychoanalytic approach would claim that in times of crisis, which tend to be marked by institutional failure, subjects are forced to rely on their subjective defence mechanisms. Russia presents a special case here, in that trust in its institutions has always been low, as a series of more conventional sociological and social psychological studies (e.g. Marková, 2004) have demonstrated. However, a shift may have occurred when these authorities - monolithic and corrupt as they may have always appeared - signalled their own loss of faith in the legitimacy of their places in the symbolic structure. Continuing this line of thought, these *intrapsychic* defence mechanisms have the tendency to get externalised and assume symptomatic form, thereby expressing themselves in an *interpsychic* manner. It is in when they become manifest in discourse that they become – if never fully legible – then at least available for analysis and interpretation. According to original psychoanalytic formulations, the activation of defence mechanisms in times of societal crisis or conflict can also lead to a form of regression to a more 'primitive' state - civilisation 'falls away' and with it the social norms and forms of sublimation acquired. The original Freudian notions of the primitive and the civilised are of course extremely problematic (see e.g. Khanna, 2003 on Freud's usage of the term 'dark continent'), but it is possible to ask whether there is anything worth retaining, as long as one remains aware of the contentious historical location of this idea.

This account of the transition from intra- to inter-psychic processes may be a crude approximation, but it provides a useful way of 'thinking oneself' into certain discursive formations, if we concede that they can share certain structural similarities with these *interpsychic* defence mechanisms. Methodologically, a strategy that is sensitive to how the unconscious operates in and through language needs to be wary of making an 'overpsychologising move', that is, a neat mapping of psychological phenomena onto discursive ones. One tactic that could assist in avoiding this is to focus on structural factors and symbolic relations within a discourse or set of discourses (e.g. Hook, 2012; Lapping, 2012). In other words, an examination of form rather than content, not unlike the analysis of the overdetermination, displacements and condensations of the manifest dream content carried out by Freud.

The approach assumed in this thesis concerns itself with speech and with the meanings and objects, both overt and covert, that emerge from it, but also with the force that sets

discourses in motion: "What characteristically generates language in us is thus the workings of our defenses" (Alcorn, 2002: 80). It requires an investigation of the particular arrangement or constellation of specific discourses, which may result in them resembling obsessive, hysteric or perverse structures, while at the same time aiming to evade the pitfalls of pathology. Affect is an integral component here, as it can be regarded as both a distinguishing feature of the discourses analysed, but also as the initial phenomenon that sets in motion the working of the defenses. Stavrakakis, seeking to combine Lacanian psychoanalysis with Laclau's later contributions to the analysis of political discourse, insists that any process of identification has a dual nature, "discursive and affective, symbolic and libidinal" (Stavrakakis, 2007: 225). It is therefore the libidinal component in identificatory processes that is linked to affect. From here, it may be possible to conclude that an affective response carries a connection to phenomena that are perceived as threats to the ego, or, contrariwise, produce enjoyment - *jouissance* in a more Lacanian vein. Problematically, few suggestions are provided as to how to locate affect within the symbolic forms available as material to the discourse analyst. Derek Hook addresses this difficulty when he speaks of affect as '*extra-discursive*':

[...] that is, as not existing beyond the range and influence of symbolic forms, even though it may of course escape explicit symbolic registration, or, more specifically, the codification of acceptable discursive form (Hook, 2011: 112).

However, if we concede that the affect-laden response to the case is an indication of a 'passionate attachment' (Butler, 1997) to the nation, or rather a fantasy thereof, then the discourse analyst may be able to discern the shape of this fantasy object in the vehement rejection of those aspects of the nation, or a version of its 'performance' (a term that is particularly apt in the present discussion) that are seen to contradict or threaten it.

What has been outlined so far in this thesis are therefore two alternate, yet complimentary approaches to locating national identification, and what is identified with: one that collects "the 'narrative ensemble' of likeable, heroic and often fairly grandiose self-representations that it [*i.e. a given community*] promotes and identifies with" (Hook, 2012), that is, the repository of mythological narratives and symbols, and the second, current one of studying an absence, or impossibility, through the policing or vehement reaction that occurs when its invisible borders are transgressed. As discussed in detail in Chapter V, one could also apply this logic to some of the gestures in support of Pussy

Riot, which then become acts of displaced identification:

Hence, the peculiar logic in the sympathetic gesture by which one objects to an injury done to another to deflect attention from an injury done to oneself, a gesture that then becomes the vehicle of displacement by which one feels for oneself through and as the other. (Butler, 1990: 100)

Members of the opposition may reject the possibility of a straightforward identification with Russia, and feel the need to maintain and voice a minimal, “cynical” distance between themselves and a particular identity constellation. In order to avoid too much ‘injury to themselves’, subjects can then only take offense *as if* on behalf of another subject.

Keeping in mind that from a psychoanalytic perspective a discourse requires libidinal investment in order to sustain it, one might also ask what the specific emotive response to Pussy Riot enables Russians to accomplish. ‘Accomplishment’ here implies an attachment to the symptom, to the specific discourse produced. Does it assist them in re-affirming positive, ‘ideal-type’ images of the nation to which they – despite prior displays of the opposite, or of indifference – continue to be attached? Do Pussy Riot’s actions represent a kind of excessive enjoyment, which needs to be disavowed through denigration and punishment? Do the women perhaps serve as a surface onto which the anxieties pertinent to the crisis of government are projected? There are clearly elements both in the women, and in the possible gratifications of participating in the Pussy Riot debate, that inspired the emotional responses, which other cases have failed to encourage. In order to delve deeper into the underlying motivations that inspired participation in the public discussions, and how those might link to wider concerns of (dis)identifying with the nation, one possible approach is to turn to psychoanalysis, because, as opposed to more traditional forms of discourse analysis, it carries the potential to go beyond the obvious, the verbalised and literal. A large part of the chapter’s analysis is dedicated to the examination of *discourses of rejection and (dis)identification*. It was felt that in their policing of Russianness and the demarcation of features deemed undesirable as embodied by the women of Pussy Riot, these discourses in fact point to latent forms of identification, or to the potential construction of libidinal communities through a shared sense of outrage. The strongly negative reactions to the punk prayer in Russia are contrasted with a shorter section on discourses by the group’s

supporters, as the latter are seen to align much more closely with the voices of their Western defenders, relying on discursive avowal or idealisation rather than various techniques of managing a perceived threat. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that both detractors and defenders of the group can be found among members of the liberal, educated elite which formed the population of interest for chapters IV and V. Consequences of this divergence will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

The majority of sources cited are based on a Russian Google (*google.ru*) news alert with the keyword ‘Pussy Riot’, which was active between August 2012 and December 2012. Additionally, a number of sources that offered a sustained engagement with the group or the case up to March 2013 were considered – altogether approximately 25 Russian-language articles were analysed closely. Articles were chosen on the basis of whether they featured a lengthier exposition of the author’s position regarding the group’s actions and the government’s response to it. Online platforms and sources that appeared several times were: snob.ru, mk.ru (*Moskovskiy Komsomolets*), kp.ru (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*) and echo.msk.ru (*Ekho Moskvy*).

Church and President

In Western media discussions of the case, the religious aspect of the group’s protest was largely neglected. At most, there were elements of a discussion into the nature of cultural relativism – would a similar act have gone unpunished in St Peter in Rome, or St Paul’s Cathedral in London? Usually, commentators agreed that an administrative fine would have been considered sufficient. In contrast, Russian contributions to the debate – in particular those rejecting the performance as a valid form of protest – frequently privileged the religious element above others, stressing the need to defend the nation’s moral foundations:

*[...] In Russia there are things that are absolutely off limits. One must not saw through a building’s load bearing beams under the pretext of refurbishment, or one will end up burying everyone.*⁷³

⁷³ [...] в России есть вещи абсолютно табуированные. Не надо под предлогом ремонта здания пилить его несущие балки - похоронит всех.

<http://www.pravda.ru/politics/parties/other/19-09-2012/1128474-0/>

The foundational character of religion in general and Russian Orthodoxy in particular, is illustrated poignantly here through the metaphor of the load bearing beams. The danger of tampering with them is evoked through the ominous image of the building, that is, the nation, collapsing and burying its inhabitants underneath the debris.

Without wishing to underestimate the personal significance that religion may have in the lives of many Russians, the disproportionate outrage over Pussy Riot's performance cannot be explained by wounded religious sentiment alone. In fact, there appears to be some agreement that frequently an attachment to Orthodoxy is a matter of personal aesthetic, rather than moral preferences, where churches: "were perceived simply as beautiful pieces of architecture or as the bearer of beautiful traditions, inserting an essential essence of spirituality into Russia's ugly consumer society"⁷⁴. As outlined in introduction, since *perestroika* and the cultural shift enabled by it, and more pronouncedly under Vladimir Putin, the Orthodox Church in Russia has been closely linked to political concerns. To reiterate:

For Putin, Russian is Orthodox and Orthodoxy is Russia, depending on his audience. The first proposition provides cover from external domination; the second proposition coaxes unity and, when necessary, motivates imperialism (Admiraal, 2009:205).

There is some truth to the notion that Orthodoxy benefited from the structural and economic breakdown of the Soviet Union and the anxieties this provoked (Eremicheva, 2010: 55) by providing a new kind of reference point to stabilize the disorganized, open-ended discourse of a new, post-communist Russia. However, it was a conscious strategy on behalf of the government to tie the image of the nation to Orthodoxy, thus alluding to its role, or a fantasy thereof⁷⁵, in pre-Bolshevik Russia. It is employed in order for Russia's former imperial greatness to become part of the national imaginary once more. While nominally a secular state, the president has made a point of repeatedly appearing in public with Kirill, Patriarch and head of the Russian Orthodox Church, and emphasising his own position as a believer by attending church regularly. Religious motifs are also increasingly entering presidential discourse – thus in his appearance in front of the

⁷⁴ <http://opendemocracy.net/od-russia/sergei-lukashevsky/how-god-came-to-vote-for-putin-background-to-pussy-riot>

⁷⁵ This harking back to a Golden Age falls in line with the Žižekian idea that, in order to conceal its non-existence, society or a nation needs to create the myth of a prelapsarian Age of Glory, which only ended when it was deprived (usually by an outside force) of its essential qualities (Žižek, 1997: 14).

country's Federal Assembly in December 2012, Putin decried the absence of 'spiritual ties' in the nation, using the rather unusual metaphor of a paper clip. Kirill had employed this very metaphor in July, when he referred to the Russian Orthodox Church as that same tie holding the nation together. It will therefore come as no surprise that the recent increase in criticism of, and public acts of protest against the government have affected the Church. The Church is seen to be meddling in secular affairs, and its clergy is regarded by many as harbouring an unseemly interest in worldly status symbols as evidenced by priests driving luxury cars and Kirill being photographed with a Swiss Breguet watch estimated to be worth over £20,000. The threat that both these authorities experience to their position in Russia is one of the motivations behind the disproportionately severe punishment of the 3 Pussy Riot members, according to sociologist Lyubov Borusyak:

The state, president and the institution of the Orthodox Church reacted badly to their loss of mass support. A pretext to return this support was necessary, even indispensable. And when a pretext is needed, it is always found. It turned out that Pussy Riot's performance was perfectly suited for it.⁷⁶

The problem with Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' for the government and the Church is therefore not what some perceive to be its blasphemous nature, but the anxious, unstable time at which it was performed. Due to their close ties, a threat to the Putin regime may now automatically implicate the Church.

**

In some media treatments, the conflict is pitched as a direct confrontation between Putin and Pussy Riot, which symbolically stand in for old, authoritarian, and new, democratic and free-spirited Russia, or between a punitive masculinity and a liberated and hence threatening femininity. In fact, it soon became evident that the President wavered initially as to whether to participate in the debate. As will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, he is fully aware and exploits to the maximum his dual role as both the most powerful political figure in the country and also its symbolic head. His public comments

⁷⁶ *Государство и президент, институт Православной церкви болезненно реагировали на то, что они теряют массовую поддержку, и нужен, даже необходим был повод поддержке вернуть. А когда повод требуется, он обязательно находится. Казалось, что выступление Pussy Riot для этого прекрасно подходит.*

http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2012-10-05/5_reaction.html

tend to be interpreted as orders, or at least indicate a personal involvement in the case; therefore the wording is always rather careful. At the same time, there appeared to have been a need for him to take sides, and not merely because the ‘punk prayer’ addressed him directly. To counter suspicions that Putin might be worried about a potential loss of authority – and thereby providing all the more fuel to these very suspicions – his statements tried to convey the sense of a circumspect individual, filled with a fatherly concern for the nation, who saw the case as an affront to his moral sensibilities, rather than to his authority:

*As a matter of fact, it was correct to arrest them, it was the correct decision made by the court. Because one must not damage the foundations of morals, morality, and destroy the country like this. What are we left with then?*⁷⁷

At the same time, he wilfully misinterpreted the group’s actions time and time again⁷⁸:

*A few years ago they hung three stuffed dolls in one of the big Moscow supermarkets, one of the participants of this group hung three stuffed dolls in a public place with a slogan calling to free Moscow from Jews, homosexuals and migrant workers...After that they organised a session of group sex in a public place. This, as one says, is their business, people have the right to do whatever they want if this does not infringe any law, but in a public place, it seems to me, that even then the authorities should have been alerted. And then they even put a clip of it on the Internet. (ibid.)*⁷⁹

However, disproportionate as the punishment may have been, it is pertinent to realize that even when activists, government critics and members of the opposition are harassed by police or imprisoned, these cases rarely garner the same amount of attention in local and international media. When one of Russia’s most famous critical voices, Anna Politkovskaya, was killed in 2006, Vladimir Putin referred to her publicly in a single, laconic statement: “Her death caused us more harm than any of her publications”⁸⁰.

⁷⁷ <http://rostov.kp.ru/online/news/1265200/>

⁷⁸ Both Voina and Pussy Riot.

⁷⁹ Пару лет назад в одном из больших супермаркетов Москвы они (участницы панк-группы) повесили три чучела, одна из участниц этой группы сегодняшней повесила три чучела в публичном месте с надписью, что нужно освободить Москву от евреев, от гомосексуалистов и от гастарбайтеров — иностранных рабочих... После этого они устроили сеанс группового секса в публичном месте. Это, как говорится, их дело, люди вправе заниматься всем, чем хотят, если это не нарушает закон, но в публичном месте, мне кажется, что уже тогда следовало бы обратить на это внимание властей. Потом еще выложили запись в интернет.

⁸⁰ <http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2012/09/20/751288-mirovye-bstvo.html>

Reactions

When a fisherman casts his fishing rod into the water, he does not always know whether the fish will swallow the bait, and what kind of fish it will be. The same applies to this situation: the state, the Church, as well as society, had they been healthy and stable, might not have been lured by it, which is what would have been the likeliest scenario. But this did not happen (Borusyak, 2012).

As suggested above, the vehemence with which the Pussy Riot debate has been conducted distinguishes it from other public scandals that preceded it: “Nothing like it has ever taken place over here” (Borusyak, 2012). More appears to be at stake for all parties involved. However, it should be pointed out that the amount of attention that the women’s arrests and prison sentences have garnered in Western media does not serve as adequate representation of the case’s reception in Russia. This applies both to the amount of criticism directed at it, as well as to the general level of public awareness – while qualitatively unusual, the number of actively vocal participants remains rather modest. According to a survey conducted by the *All-Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion*, more than 60% of respondents claimed not to have followed the trial⁸¹. However, 86% did indicate a general familiarity with the case. Those who signalled the greatest degree of interest in the trial were individuals with higher education (10%) and inhabitants of the ‘two capitals’ Moscow and St Petersburg (15%). Both these groups are strongly represented in Chapters IV and V.

According to another survey conducted by the *Foundation for Public Opinion* in August 2012, a 53% majority of Russians in fact support the court’s verdict⁸². An earlier survey by *Levada-Center* found that only 5% of respondents felt that sentencing was unnecessary, with 66% of respondents agreeing that a prison sentence or forced labour would be more appropriate forms of punishment⁸³. Two significant points emerge here: the aforementioned lack of engagement with politics or matters of societal interest⁸⁴, that is, “social dispersion and/or narcissistic withdrawal (Oushakine, 2000: 1011), which is a consequence both of the late Soviet era, and the tumult and ‘non-identity’ of the 1990s. The other is that, because participation in the Pussy Riot – debate is by no means prevalent and mainly restricted to the country’s cultural elite, there must be something at

⁸¹ <http://top.rbc.ru/society/12/09/2012/669236.shtml>

⁸² <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10606>

⁸³ <http://www.levada.ru/31-07-2012/rossiyane-o-dele-pussy-riot>

⁸⁴ <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/artemy-troitsky-peter-pomerantsev-oliver-carroll/talking-point-is-culture-new-politics-in->

stake for those taking part, a kind of ‘psychic pay-off’, for example as a reward for defending the coveted object or self-representation that is under threat at this time.

Reactions in the West

In the West, the reaction to the arrest, trial, and subsequent verdict has overwhelmingly been one of outrage at the harshness of the punishment metered out. International human rights organisations and members of various European parliaments publicly criticised the Russian government for its handling of the incident. Eventually, Pussy Riot were nominated for the European Parliament’s *Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought*⁸⁵, and took up 16th place in a list of *Top Global Thinkers* 2012 published by the journal *Foreign Policy*. The list of celebrity supporters is ever-growing and now includes artists such as Madonna, Sting, Sir Paul McCartney and Yoko Ono. Two statements serve as good representations of the overall tone of the public discussion in the West. One is Slavoj Žižek’s statement about the group’s significance, following the verdict’s announcement:

Their message is: IDEAS MATTER. They are conceptual artists in the noblest sense of the word: artists who embody an Idea⁸⁶.

The other is by a journalist writing for German magazine *Der Spiegel*:

Because the Revolution can be sexy. Future revolutionaries – especially when they come with black cherry eyes and cite Solzhenitsyn or Simone de Beauvoir while sitting in a glass cage – are more successfully publicised in news footage than any diatribe by grey-bearded, longsuffering dissidents.⁸⁷

To summarise what is conveyed in these two exemplary quotes: Pussy Riot insist on a vision of an alternative Russia. Their message is at odds with the current authoritarian regime’s position, and the women were punished for their brazen display of contempt for the government, religion, and the current rules of engagement with them. They represent a new type of revolutionary – young, attractive women who take their cue from

⁸⁵ Its first recipient was Nelson Mandela.

⁸⁶ Published on

http://dangerousminds.net/comments/the_true_blasphemy_slavoj_zhizhek_on_pussy_riot

⁸⁷ *Denn Revolution kann sexy sein, und Revolutionärinnen in spe, zumal wenn sie körschäugig Solschenizyn oder Simone de Beauvoir im Glaskasten zitieren, lassen sich in Kurznachrichtensendungen besser unters Volk bringen als jede noch so leiderfabrene Snada eines graubärtigen Dissidenten. (DER SPIEGEL 33/2012*

<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-87737196.html>, emphasis added.)

dissidents and philosophers, but employ this knowledge in a media-friendly manner in order to challenge the system⁸⁸.

Responses to the response

In Russia, this led to a kind of ‘response to the response’ coming from the West, a further elaboration of the assumption of a political and personal stance that the case provoked and simultaneously enabled. For opponents of Pussy Riot, supporting them largely equates with being Western-centric, documenting that the centuries-old division into Slavophiles and pro-Western Russians still holds relevance today, with the so-called ‘creative class’ being grouped in the latter camp:

“Progressivism”, the desire to be contemporary, free from the past and its traditions by all means (and to be fashionable as well (Internet, iPad, Pussy Riot, Occupy Arbai⁸⁹) has played a mean joke with our intelligentsia. It separates itself further and further from the people by not wishing to recognise its entitlement to tradition and to spirituality.⁹⁰

The statement by Eduard Limonov, leader of the extremist National Bolshevik Party, and someone who used to be a Soviet *enfant terrible* himself after the publication of his scandalous memoir in the 1980s, is typical not only of the criticism of Pussy Riot, but of the tone used to disparage the opposition movement in general. Its seemingly elitist obsession with new technology and media-friendly sound bites, often in English, is juxtaposed with the people’s need for moral and spiritual values, which Pussy Riot are seen to have ridiculed. Speaking of ‘our intelligentsia’, Limonov describes behaviour and a moral stance that is deemed frivolous because it is far removed from the people. As currently the most outrageous members of this cultural elite, Pussy Riot are similarly seen by their opponents to be personifying an excessive kind of enjoyment, a type of *jouissance* that becomes all the more menacing as it insists on displaying itself publicly. One way of explaining what it is that makes the group so threatening is that they may be seen to be in possession of a type of enjoyment from which ‘ordinary’ Russians are barred or to which they’ve lost access - a coveted quality or ability which is then exaggerated and treated as threat to a more properly Russian, and therefore more

⁸⁸ They are also frequently mentioned together with the activists of FEMEN, no doubt for being Eastern European and female, but their tactics in fact differ significantly.

⁸⁹ Name given to recent protest movement in Russia, after statue of poet in Moscow square where meetings were frequently held.

⁹⁰ <http://limonov-eduard.livejournal.com/246726.html>

reassuring, way of life. Without overstating the parallels with analyses of racism, there is a link to be made here with the idea that fear and hatred towards an other are often an indication of envy, of believing the other to possess a highly-coveted quality, which may then become fetishized – in this case the ‘creative class’ obsession with new technology and a Western outlook (e.g. Hook 2005, 2011b; Žižek, 1989, 1993).

Spectrum of affect

Returning to the initial questions guiding the analysis, it is helpful to first identify the gamut of affective responses most prevalent in the debate. To clarify: while these responses are characterised by affect, by emotional overtones, it is not affect itself that is being investigated here. Instead, affect here is treated as indicative of discourses either having assumed the structure of defence reactions, or of having become attached to identity structures such as fantasies and anxieties which can be explored psychoanalytically. To briefly draw a parallel with clinical work and the problems of establishing a diagnosis: a manifestation of affect can rarely be linked with certainty to a specific psychic process:

The advice that Edith Jacobson gave in the 1950s is still absolutely precise: she warned that affect is never enough to make a diagnosis, although the quality and the intensity of the affect can give a clue as to the underlying thought process (Leader, 2011: 135).

At their most intense, these responses have included a sense of anxiety, outrage and even physical disgust, as exemplified by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev’s statement in September:

*I think in this case a suspended sentence would be sufficient. But from an emotional point of view – and I apologise of the un-parliamentary expression – what they did makes me nauseous, the way they look and the hysteria that’s accompanied this story.*⁹¹

As will become apparent in the following sections, adversaries of Pussy Riot often resort to aggressive or violent language – at times with barely veiled sexual connotations. These two registers are combined in a discourse marked by profanity, which becomes all the more contradictory as the members of Pussy Riot are so frequently criticised for their use

⁹¹ Здесь, на мой взгляд, достаточно условного наказания. Но с эмоциональной точки зрения — я извиняюсь за непарламентское выражение — меня тошнит от того, что они сделали, от их внешнего вида и от той истерики, которая сопровождает эту историю.

<http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2012/09/12/1033560.html>

of expletives - still something of a taboo in Russia, particularly for women. Even in more benign manifestations of this discourse, the three women are repeatedly referred to as 'silly fools' (дуры) or 'idiots' (идiotки) by both journalists and bloggers. Finally, the group's name and politics regarding gender and sexuality evoke a whole row of negative responses, ranging from unease to revulsion and outright rejection.

From mental illness to demon possession

The language of psychoanalysis, as observed by scholars such as Nikolas Rose (1999) and Ian Parker (1997) in their interpretation and further expansion of the Foucaultian concept of the *psy-complex*, has been appropriated not only by professional practitioners and academics working in the field. It has also entered popular discourse and, in the case of Pussy Riot, has been aligned with the conservative gender politics of Russia. As indicated by the chapter's title, the notion of hysteria – in a conceptualisation that is widely acknowledged as obsolete is not only applied to a translation of the group's name – its implications serve as motivation for the women's behaviour, who are remote-diagnosed with a number of disorders, from a form of mental illness to actual possession by demons. This type of argument circulated by the detractors of Pussy Riot is a classic strategy to weaken the arguments put forward by women – coming from an unreliable, possibly hysteric or mentally unstable source, the arguments themselves are unlikely to be credible. One might ask whether this is one of the strategies to keep at bay the anxiety which these young women have stirred up. Much of the aggression that is on display is directed towards the lifestyles the women are seen to represent. Paradoxically, the group members are seen as both too feminine to be taken seriously as political activists, such as when their activism is linked to 'broken hearts' and their feminist standpoints treated as a consequence of a disappointment following unsuccessful relationships with men⁹², yet also as not feminine enough, such as when they are criticised for their lack of adequate display of motherhood.

What's in a name?

The team of lawyers representing Pussy Riot have recently tried to have the group's name registered as a trademark in Russia in order to be able to sell merchandise using the name Pussy Riot⁹³. *Rospatent*, Russia's regulatory body for patents and trademarks, rejected the application on the grounds that some Internet dictionaries and translation

⁹² <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1026944/>

⁹³ This provoked a further rift between the women and their lawyers, as Ekaterina Samutsevich insists they had requested a registration of the trademark name chiefly in order to prevent its unauthorized use, and not its commercial exploitation.

engines provide an obscene translation of the name. However, according to research conducted by the BBC's Russian language website, both Google and the popular Russian server Yandex translate it as 'kitty mutiny', whereas the translation software Babylon 9 renders it into English as 'Big Kitty of Disorder'. All other websites mentioned in the official rejection statement do not provide a translation of the group's name.

The dread of any form of 'obscurity', coupled with an anxiety surrounding both gender and sexuality, and a wish to police both, is especially prevalent in a country with relatively conservative gender politics such as Russia. This means that special emphasis was put on the Pussy Riot's links with street-art group *Voina*, whose members at one time included Samutsevich and Tolokonnikova, and in particular two acts performed by *Voina*, namely "Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear" and "How to Snatch a Chicken". For the first, members of the group, including Tolokonnikova, performed public sex in a museum in Moscow as a way of mocking governmental policies that were implemented in order to raise the country's birth rate. For the latter, a female activist stuffed a frozen chicken into her vagina in a supermarket and subsequently left without paying. These actions are linked to Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' in order to illustrate how, if left unchecked, they could contribute to the moral decay of society, going beyond a mocking of religion to the wholesale erosion of family values.

The anxiety, said to have been inspired by the women's overall demeanour, is illustrated straightforwardly by the public's relation to the name Pussy Riot. In contributions to the debate, a correlation is frequently made between a personal unease with the name, how one chooses to translate it into Russian, and how the women should be judged altogether. Language, like any symbolic system, is marked by condensation and overdetermination of meaning, leaving it forever open to interpretation. This openness seems particularly anxiety-provoking when it comes to translations of the group's name. The unease caused by the multiplicity of meanings becomes all the more pronounced as the name contains a threat – the promise of violence and change inherent in the word 'riot', as well as sexual, potentially obscene connotations. Both words are in English, making its sense doubly obscure, as well as implying a potential pandering to the West, or Westernised ideas. The threat that the group represents is therefore partially embodied in its ambiguous name. This ambiguity needs to be managed; meaning needs to be fixed – for example by staking a claim to the name's definite translation, which can focus on

regressive or progressive elements of the name, exaggerate or understate the sexual or violent associations. The spectrum of translations into Russian ranges from ‘Frenzied Vagina’, the most popular choice⁹⁴, to ‘Frenzied Uteri’, ‘Frenzied Kitten’ and, finally, ‘Velvet Revolution’.

In October 2012, online business newspaper *Business Gazeta* published the results of a qualitative survey it had conducted among its readers (mainly entrepreneurs, but also academics, professional translators and members of the creative industries)⁹⁵. The survey asked the following question: “Do you know how to translate the name of the group Pussy Riot into Russian?” and published 20 detailed statements. The following quote is representative of the tone that can be encountered in many of them:

[...] And actually this is what it [i.e. the name, MB] aims to do – the violation of linguistic norms goes hand in hand with the violation of social norms.

An easy equation is made here between words and actions – a name that carries violent connotations is almost automatically assumed to aim at violent actions. This kind of mental operation puts the symbolic and the literal on the same plane. The diffuse threat exerted by Pussy Riot – crystallised in its name – is therefore processed in an almost psychotic manner. We may recall that a psychotic structure is characterised by subjects’ inability to use language playfully, or to distance themselves from words or symbols that are treated as interpellations or calls for action (Leader, 2011). In other words, it is “a relationship between the subject and signifier in its most formal dimension, in its dimension as a pure signifier” (Lacan, cited in Evans, 1996: 158). This threat is further qualified in the following quote:

*If in their publications, the media were to use the Russian translation instead of the English version, the perception in society would be completely different. The group would not attract so many sympathisers. After all, what is a riot? Chaos and destruction. And the use of this word in combination with female genitals points to a feminisation. Pussy Riot oppose the traditional family, and support homosexual relations. This is abnormal. This is a form of perversion.*⁹⁶

Several elements emerge here: there is an implicit criticism of the group’s decision to use an English name, as if this suggests a performance exclusively for the Western gaze, or for

⁹⁴ According to <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/68151/>, 49% of respondents favoured this translation.

⁹⁵ <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/68151/>

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

the small circle of initiated Russian 'intelligentsia' mentioned previously in Limonov's statement. The image that is further evoked is doubly menacing: the wholesale 'chaos' and 'destruction' of one's way of life, including that of traditional gender dynamics and – identity. The women's self-proclaimed feminism and non-traditional lifestyles are seen as direct attacks on the 'traditional family' – one indication of which is an alleged support of 'homosexual relations'.

How is this danger to be kept at bay, and how are subjects to manage the sense of revulsion that the performative evocation of the other's enjoyment seems to provoke? After all, what does it represent if not illicit enjoyment, "something that the desiring subjects hanker after; it exemplifies the displaced element of their being that they experience as unjustly lost"(Hook, 2012:143). It is therefore both desired by, and unavailable to those who have made themselves subject to the Law. One way of containing it, as we have seen, is to denigrate the other by exaggerating or unjustly dwelling on certain aspects of their demeanour and what this is seen to represent:

How to translate the name of this group? But there are unprintable words... "Frenzied, possessed vagina" – this is how this combination of words is translated. I follow this punk group's case, and I am deeply disgusted by what the girls have done. Of course the sentence is very harsh, but on the other hand it serves as a demonstrative flogging for those who trespass in a similar way.

At the same time, repeated references to forms of punishment that could or should be administered to the women could mean that there is a link to be made between the violence inflicted upon them in the form of incarceration and forced labour, and fantasies of violence acted out in some of the anti-Pussy Riot discourses. These considerations are important as the latter part of the chapter will illustrate the role enjoyment plays in elicitation of identification - both in the act of identifying perpetrators of a 'theft of enjoyment', and in creating communities of the offended joined together in wounded attachments.

Return of the Repressed

An article published in September 2012 makes this link explicit:

Maybe the icon defilers and Pussy Riot just need a good flogging?
Incidentally, as a survey by *All-Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion* showed, every fourth Russian is not opposed to such corporal punishment. 27% of respondents are in favour of adding corporal punishment to the Criminal Code⁹⁷.

One could claim that the author playing devil's advocate here, but it remains justified to ask why there appears to be a need to link the two. Does this excerpt not follow the logic of negation, whereby, even when an explicit connection between two symbols or images is overtly denied, it is nevertheless through the very fact of these having been mentioned together that an unconscious link can be presupposed? The recurrent fantasmatic enactments of corporal punishment inflicted on the women, which finds its expression in the sexualised, even ritualised image of a flogging, therefore points to a violence that has spilled over into, and permeates discourses of Pussy Riot. However, it may have its origin in events or discourses preceding these recent events. Russian history of the 20th century is full of both brief eruptions of brutality, and sustained periods of destruction. There has been violence of a total -and totalitarian - nature, such as during Stalinism; or, of a less paranoid and absolute, but nevertheless traumatic kind, such as during the chaotic 1990s. This violence seeped into, and was re-enforced by discourses of these periods – be it the official Stalinist rhetoric with its strange euphemisms such as “Life has gotten better; life has become more cheerful”⁹⁸, and its ubiquitous, thinly veiled references to state brutality, such as “*Лес рубят, щепки летят*”, which can roughly be translated as “You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs”. A more prominent violence *in language* became the norm in the 1990s after the abolishment of official state censorship. Obscene and slang terms, previously taboo, entered popular culture through films and books of the period (Borenstein, 2008).

One argument to be put forward here is that while official remembrance of the trauma of Stalinism has been all but banished, the period's linguistic manifestations have never fully disappeared, representing another instance of the ‘return of the repressed’ already alluded to in the introduction. Its violence has therefore been (almost totally) repressed,

⁹⁷ <http://www.tv100.ru/news/pussy-riot-nado-prosto-vyporot-62201/>

⁹⁸ *Жить стало лучше, жить стало веселее.*

but discourses of the Putin period have retained the ‘performative aspects’ (Gusejnov, 2012) of this phase in Russian history. A telling example is a statement prepared after a meeting by the ‘Workers’ Collective Togliattiazot⁹⁹’ in October 2012, in which it announced that it:

[...] is prepared to receive the Pussy Riot hooligans in their business after completion of their sentence in order to re-educate these party-girls from the capital in their healthy work atmosphere so as to help them become worthy members of society, as well as real mothers. In these conditions the workers’ collective ‘Togliattiazot’ gives a firm workers’ ‘no’ in response to the boulevard-haunting loafers from the capital and their ‘foreign’ group of supporters.¹⁰⁰

One need not perform a discourse analyse in this instance to recognise the proto-Soviet language in use: the announcement is spoken from a position of collectivity and propriety, in opposition to the small minority which is being condemned here for its loose morals and general attitude of frivolity. According to Gusejnov, this is in fact how the Pussy Riot debate is conducted by the group’s critics: ”on the one side – the enemy, one the other – one of us” (Gusejnov, 2012: 4). The threat of a compulsory re-education programme smacks of the ambitions of the early Soviet period to create New Soviet Man, and the reference to ‘real’ motherhood – presumably versus the simulacrum of maternity provided by ‘these party-girls’ – is reminiscent of fascist discourse. The omnipresent paranoia and fear of foreign infiltration so typical of Stalinism is also represented here in the reference to support by non-Russians¹⁰¹.

Why then this resort, or regression to archaic, potentially traumatic language? Gusejnov’s argument, with more than a hint of *Kulturpessimismus* to it, is that the failure to conduct a proper *Destalinisation* of language since the 1950s means these linguistic resources have been available throughout, in fact experiencing an increased ‘demand’ in the last decade. The fact that Stalinist rhetoric is ‘formulaic’ and ‘derisive’ as well as uniquely ‘accessible

⁹⁹ A chemical plant in Southern Russia.

¹⁰⁰ "Коллектив "Тольяттиазот" готов принять хулиганок из Pussy Riot после отбытия наказания на свое предприятие, чтобы в здоровой трудовой атмосфере перевоспитать этих столичных тусовщиц и помочь им стать полноценными членами общества и настоящими матерями", - говорится в резолюции митинга. "В этих условиях трудовой коллектив "Тольяттиазот" говорит твердое рабочее "нет" в ответ столичным бульварным бездельникам и их "забугорной" группе поддержки", - говорится в резолюции митинга.
<http://www.interfax.ru/news.asp?id=269151>

¹⁰¹ See once more the link with the quote by Limonov.

to the common man'¹⁰², together with the – according to Gusejnov – prevalent Stalinist social practice of the “joyful repression of consciousness” (ibid., p. 6), that is, the suppression of any tendency to sympathise with the other, led to a society that is uniquely intolerant and rigorous in its demands to punish the other – perhaps as a result of having split off these uncomfortable aspects of itself, and then needing to locate them in others: “let’s imagine a society which lives [...] without self-analysis – not reflexively, but *deflectively*” (Gusejnov, 2012: 4, my emphasis).

In other words: while a ‘return of the repressed’ is usually linked to neurotic symptoms, that is, a repression of infantile wishes which subsequently resurface as behavioural symptoms or fantasies, the title of this section reflects the argument that there is a case to be made here for a return of the repressed *in* and *through language*. The improper ‘working-through’ of the past, evidenced by the unreflecting use of the linguistic memes of Stalinism which have been emptied of any links to historical context, means that it thus retained a violence which is now coming back to haunt the speaking subject and its discourses. This violence is symptomatic of an inability to tolerate the ambiguity inherent in the multiple meanings of the group’s name and its performances referred to in the previous section. Rather than retain a position of ambivalence regarding Pussy Riot, a stance that appears ‘safer’ to the most vocal opponents of the group is one of rejection. This insistence on a firm stance has been taken to an extreme by one of the most notable detractors of the group, who has taken to the case with a quasi-religious fervour.

Man on a Mission

The shrillness which the tone of discussions about PR can attain, has reached a well-publicised apogee in a series of documentaries and interviews involving infamous investigative TV journalist Andrey Mamontov. This ‘enraged parishioner’¹⁰³ approaches the case with an ardour that can only be described as religious, treating it as he does as a fight between the forces of good and evil. Between spring and autumn 2012, he produced and broadcast three documentaries about PR (each entitled “*Провокаторы*” – “*Agitators*”) on Russia’s Channel One (*Perviy Kanal – Rossiya*). The main thesis underlying all three programmes is that the cathedral performance was not a political act

¹⁰² Gusejnov refers to this catchy quality of Stalinist discourse as ‘conduration’ (кондурация), from the Latin ‘condurare’, meaning ‘to harden’.

¹⁰³ <http://lenta.ru/articles/2012/09/13/mamontov/>

of protest, but instead aimed to provoke and create a rift in the Orthodox Church, thereby weakening the country's 'moral foundations'. However, he insists that the women alone were not capable of organising and staging something as elaborate as the 'punk prayer'. In the third and final instalment of the programme, Mamontov shows what he presents as conclusive evidence that it was in fact supported and paid for by recently deceased, London-based oligarch Boris Berezovsky and a number of foreign organisations. He refers to members of the group exclusively as "*кощунницы*" – 'blasphemers', and translates their name as "crazed female genitals", thus providing further substance to the link made in an earlier section between the public's relationship to the name and one's overall stance.

What emerges repeatedly in Mamontov's films and public statements is a tendency to arrive at a partial understanding of their message. This is particularly remarkable when considering that some observers have criticised the group for their lack of a clear agenda (Chehonadskikh, 2012). There is no such hesitation in Mamontov: 'they' are literally trying to destroy Russia's faith, and with it the entire country. Other aspects of his anti-Pussy discourse are a complete absence of doubt as well as a genuine outrage; the interview from which quotes are utilised for this section had to be interrupted at some point as he got too enraged to continue. In fact, demonstrating and eliciting affective responses has become something of a trademark: *Mamontovshchina* is the title given to a genre of documentary films, which relies on immediate emotional responses, by the audience, rather than a firm factual base¹⁰⁴. For Mamontov, there are only two positions in the debate – for or against; good or evil. No platform is provided or even imagined possible for a more ambivalent stance. The films are seen to be part of a plan to help combat wicked forces - with the author and host clearly speaking from a position of hubris. The 'mission' on which Mamontov sees himself is one for which he was personally selected: "I was only appointed by God"¹⁰⁵ in order to defend "God's presence in this world". This insistence on having a divine calling is coupled with a sense of being personally addressed and attacked by Pussy Riot: "They came into my home. [...] They touched my faith. So now what, I'm supposed to forgive them?"

Mamontov's idea of having a higher calling to save Russia from moral decay, following the symbolic operation of splitting society into good and bad elements, carries certain

¹⁰⁴ <http://lenta.ru/articles/2012/09/13/mamontov/>

¹⁰⁵ All quotes from now on: <http://lenta.ru/articles/2012/09/13/mamontov/>

similarities with psychotic structures, or even with the paranoid-schizoid position introduced by Melanie Klein. This sense of a mission is taken on with great gravitas and verve, leading to what one might term an excessive production of language and images in the form of 3 feature-length documentaries. This is by no means an attempt to pathologise Andrey Mamontov the individual – after all he was commissioned to produce these programmes by state television and has a solid background in investigative journalism. One should instead assume this outrage to be, if not entirely strategic, then at least carefully planned in its public form of expression. It appears that Mamontov has touched upon a specific configuration of the Pussy Riot discourse and is willing to become a sounding board for it. However, this does indicate that the more extreme configurations of the anti-Pussy Riot discourse seem to have similar characteristics to a quasi-psychotic structure.

As mentioned previously, Mamontov conducts the discourse by first of all appealing to affect. He principally achieves this through personalising the way the debate is held, that is, by presenting the performance as an attack on the religious and moral sensibilities of each upstanding citizen of Russia. When the interviewer refuses to be swayed by an appeal to morals or religion, Mamontov changes tactics to further enhance the potential for insult:

*It's your birthday, your mother and father are seated at the table, and suddenly strangers in masks come in and start dancing on the table, scattering the apples and the cake. And you wouldn't complain to the police?*¹⁰⁶

The scene of three young masked women dancing and singing in a cathedral is transformed into the image of a peaceful family celebration disrupted by the terrifying intrusion of strangers. There is no immediate connection between these two scenes, but nevertheless the association is presented as perfectly logical by the interlocutor. Instead, one is left wondering to what moral or spiritual authority the TV journalist is appealing here in order to seek assistance against what he presents as an intolerable threat. What emerges is an injunction to feel affronted, to demand punishment. Therefore, when the interviewer fails to see the connection between the two abovementioned images, and subsequently insists on describing the court verdict as too harsh, he in turn is at the receiving end of Mamontov's anger:

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

A.M.: "This means there is nothing sacred for you. It's like your mother being insulted. Is your mother sacred to you?" - "Yes." -A.M.: "So if your mother is being insulted, there is no need to punish anyone? What, you'd be silent?"¹⁰⁷

Like the logic that dominates the world of the paranoid subject, this discourse, while remaining fixated on certain individuals or objects that are seen as sources of harm, has integrated them into a more elaborate conceptualisation of the universe. According to Mamontov's programmes, the crisis in which Russia has found itself is the result of "this infernal liberal mollusc, which has spread its tentacles all over the country":

*In my opinion, Russia is at breaking point right now. We'll either slide into collapse, or we overcome this ideological void by using our minds to try to understand, what we live for. No one outside Russia cares about this. There is a country with lost of natural resources and a huge territory. It is to be treated like a colony, so that everything turns out like it is in the West, with total globalization. [...] So that all borders get erased, so that there won't be the great Russian people, great Russian literature, and instead just a smallish regional state. In order to achieve this, people's brains need to be washed and Western values need to be introduced. I am against this.*¹⁰⁸

According to the above, the case of Pussy Riot occurs at an especially vulnerable time for the country – an assessment that most commentators would agree with. However, Mamontov's analysis differs in what is at stake for Russia: here, it is a nation that is set to lose its sovereignty, and Russians as a people may lose their identity due to a process of cultural and moral colonisation by the West. It possibly comes as no surprise that in times of societal crises, paranoid narratives increasingly gain currency. This is further illustrated by that fact that in Russia of the 1990s there was a similar prevalence of conspiracy theories. One of the most popular manifestations was the Dulles Plan, an alleged Cold War- era plot by the CIA with the distinct aim of bringing down the Soviet Union through the erosion of its moral and aesthetic foundations¹⁰⁹. In both the current, 'psychotic' anti-Pussy Riot discourse and previous narratives of national threat and disintegration, blame is either allocated directly to the West, or to the country's liberal opposition, which is seen to be financed by foreign supporters that seek to weaken Russia.

Again, it is worthwhile here to stress that the aim is emphatically not to pathologise specific individuals, but to pay attention to the patterns and structure evident in the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ http://moscow-post.ru/redactor/krizis_nravstvennosti_ili_plan_dallesa_xxi_veka10102/

discourses they employ, perhaps deliberately, in order to trigger affect and engender solidarity in the audience. The discourse in question exhibits features similar to paranoid defence mechanism, and the more defensive, heated and desperate (indeed, frenzied) the discourse becomes, the more it exhibits similarities with the reoccurring ‘psychotic’ features in psychical structure, that is, either 1) a paranoid preoccupation with a ‘big Other’ or Father which is larger than life and pulling all the strings, such as in the abovementioned conspiracy theories, or, 2) the apparent opposite, a complete lack of mooring, the absence of an obvious Other of shared social norms and prohibitions, the disorienting failure of any anchoring to a given social law. Indeed, some would go so far as to argue that specific phases in a nation’s history display specific ‘patterns of discourse’, which can share structural similarities with psychic structures. In other words:

Just as the world’s weather is determined by global and local forces,
so is the world of human discourse. Global patterns of discourse
reflect the shared libidinal styles of large numbers of speakers loosely
united as a community by the discourse that structures their
identities (Bracher et al, 1997: 32).

Who gets to speak for Russia?

So far, the analysis has focused on the group’s opponents. However, this investigation would be skewed without some consideration of the nature of pro-Pussy Riot responses. While some commentators choose to employ humour or irony to distance themselves from the earnest, moralising tone of the group’s opponents, there are also those who approach this debate with similar seriousness. Like the detractors, they see this case as a symbolic struggle over the country’s future, so that it becomes pivotal to take a stand against the treatment the women have experienced. The group’s supporters engage in a similarly affect-laden discussion over who gets to speak for Russia, and what kind of Russia is to be envisioned. For them, too, the question arises of what the moral or ethical foundations of this nation are to be. A sense of social and cultural alienation speaks through these reactions – the ‘creative class’ is in the minority, but at the same time it has always relied on this sense of isolation or distinctness to make up its identity and fuel its struggles.

The intelligentsia’s idealistic - and mostly ineffectual - struggle for a different Russia is reminiscent of the *discourse of the hysteric*, representing one of Lacan’s four discourses.

These are often presented as the French psychoanalyst's contribution to an analysis of social relations from a structural perspective, particularly pertinent to France in the late 1960s. However, "the hysterical structure of discourse also characterizes other instances of resistance, protest, and complaint" (Bracher, 1997: 122), so that it can be applied not only to hysterics' questioning of their sexual position, but also to revolutionary or quasi-revolutionary moments, such as the recent *Occupy* movements in many parts of the world:

In the post-shock society, where alternative politics is relegated to the ghetto and official public life is concentrated on the affirmative rituals of representatives of power, the only way to break the situation of passivity and silence is – somehow – to practise this hysterical and obscene speech. (Chehonadskikh, 2012: 4)

When envisioning a different Russia, a question that perpetually occupies those in the opposition is where the nation's gaze should turn for inspiration. Should it be looking toward the West, as much of the capital-dwelling 'creative class' seems to suggest, or should the gaze turn inward, and perhaps even to the past? The second option at times relies on historical, or rather, imaginary notions of Russian greatness founded on a mixture of Orthodox Christianity and literary images of a pre-communist, Tsarist Russia¹¹⁰.

Present-day Russia, on the other hand, tends to be defined in terms of its 'backwardness', explained by an unfinished civilising process:

*Russian society is adolescent, nasty, having undergone Christianisation only in appearance. That is why Russians stick to people from their own circle. And whoever happens to be outside might as well end up at the stake (especially, if this pleases the bosses)*¹¹¹.

This is the tone to be encountered frequently. It is characterised by arrogance, and a missionary zeal to educate the majority of the Russian people, thereby liberating them from their primitivism. The monstrous society they inhabit: "[...] wants to respond with the most violent means possible to those who uncovered the great societal hypocrisy" (Guseijnov, 2012:7). Directions for readers of such pieces penned by the opposition include the following recommendation: "I think that looking up online the unfamiliar words and names from my text is a useful exercise"¹¹². Not only are those who oppose

¹¹⁰ See the chapter on 'Natasha's Dance' for further examples.

¹¹¹ <http://www.rosbalt.ru/blogs/2012/09/07/1031550.html>

¹¹² <http://www.rosbalt.ru/blogs/2012/09/07/1031550.html>

Pussy Riot declared undereducated and lacking in aesthetic sophistication, they are also accused of being driven by an inability to distinguish between symbolic and material reality: “A central position hereby is assumed by the logic of violent physical acts in response to symbolic ones” (Gusejnov, 2012: 6). This intolerance of ambiguity, and suspicion of the open-endedness of language is in line with the present chapter’s analysis. However, the opposition’s agenda of enlightenment from above means that they suffer from a similar zeal to fix meaning in order to align it with this agenda:

In the given context, if we are to look at the word order, we can see that the word pussy comes first, which means it serves as an adjective. According to dictionaries, it is to be translated as ‘tender, soft, velvety’. Riot, on the other hand, means uprising, revolution. Together it can be translated as ‘velvet revolution’. There is no evidence of indecent meaning here. What they had in mind was the same kind of revolution as the one take that took place in Czechoslovakia. It’s a global idea – a change in power without bloodshed. I am certain that this is the only correct translation.¹¹³

This version skirts around the deliberate provocation and shock-value of the group’s name, in order to produce the most benign, acceptable translation possible. While some may thus criticise the absence of a concrete vision at the heart of Pussy Riot’s project, for the participants in the debate this very absence has supplied ample space to fill this absence with their own projections in order to celebrate or vilify these. Overall, the reading favoured by the group’s supporters, is illustrative of the profound split in contemporary Russia, where the nation itself is divided into two groups: the uneducated and uncouth masses, and the cultivated, liberal elite which, in the footsteps of the *intelligentsia*, sees itself as holding the monopoly on being able to speak for Russia (Matveev, 2014; see chapter I). However, this means that the very nature of Pussy Riot’s acts of protest, in the context of the most recent manifestations of the protest movement in Russia, may make it unsuitable for effecting any true change. An important facet of this split which was made apparent as part of an examination of discourses of Pussy Riot is that this split is to some degree reproduced among the liberal, educated elite in Russia. The outrage that many participants in the debate felt when the coveted object of the nation was perceived to be threatened (facets of which were described in Chapters IV and V), is in direct contrast to other members of the *intelligentsia*’s elevation and celebration of the women and the kind of Russia they represent.

¹¹³ <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/68151/>

Conclusion

One really wants to love one's country, as a kind and merciful place, one that is at the same time strong and prosperous, but it isn't working. It hasn't worked to mobilise society in order to combat the 'blasphemous women', to close ranks behind the state (Borusyak, 2012).¹¹⁴

This chapter sought to explain the surge of negative affect following Pussy Riot's performance and subsequent involvement with the legal apparatus. The affective reactions were read in terms of a response to a threat. The threat referred to here was directed at 'coveted', fantasy objects, which form the heart of any process of identification. These led to the proliferation of discourses that structurally resemble defence mechanisms, with these structures – at their most extreme - being inhabited by a logic similar to that of the psychotic or the hysteric. The discourses speak of a fear of disintegration and chaos, of wishing to avoid a return to the traumatic nineties. They appear to circumscribe different variations of the same fantasy object – that of the nation as not just resilient, but triumphant, as well as giving further clues into the nature of 'passionate attachments' (Butler, 1997) to this object.

If we recall that any process of identification requires affect in the form of libidinal investment in order to sustain it, then the affective responses to the case appear to point to a form of identification:

The important point is to realise that without this cathectic (affective) investment in an object [...] there will not be a symbolic order either. So the affective, the cathectic investment, is not the other of the symbolic but its very precondition. (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2010: 236)

Following this analysis, it can perhaps be more convincingly argued that previous declarations to the opposite effect, that is, statements that seem to indicate a lack of identification with the nation or indeed a refusal to do so, in fact point to Butler's idea that this can be an indication that identification has already taken place. This 'wounded attachment' is potentially a more readily available form of national identification at this particular historical juncture. It is an identification that needs to mask itself, and which, like something shameful, cannot easily be admitted to the ego.

¹¹⁴ *Очень хочется любить свою страну, но доброй и милосердной, при этом сильной и процветающей, однако не получается. Как не получилось, мобилизовав общество на борьбу с «кошунницами», сплотиться вокруг государства.*

One way of bringing identificatory processes to the fore is therefore to stage a possible loss of this ideal. Borusyak (2012) seems justified in saying that a more stable society would be able to tolerate this potential danger, but in these rather tense times for Russia, it was relatively easy to present one of the many acts of protest as a threat to the very foundations of the nation. However, this is not to say that Pussy Riot was selected as an arbitrary target for attention and punishment. The disconcerting nature of their particular configuration of femininity, together with their brazen criticism of the country's two major authorities, provided a perfect target. For the group's opponents, their public displays of protest represent a form of 'stolen enjoyment', from which they themselves were barred and to which the only reaction possible was therefore one of a rejection that demands punishment. Indeed, a sense of solidarity based on outrage, that is, a type of wounded attachment, can even serve as a basis for identification. Perceived (or actual) injustices shared by a given community can in fact quite easily summon up a commonality of identification – the Holocaust and anti-Semitism serving a similar function in the case of Jewish group identification.

Žižek claims that: "A nation exists only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths." (1993: 112). Returning specifically to *national* identification, he presents this enjoyment as the key to understanding a community's coherence in opposition to other communities – each society attempts to cover over its inherent antagonism by 'outsourcing' it. One way of comprehending the prolonged negative responses to the case, and the subsequent counterreactions by the opposition is therefore that they also provide a way of 'enjoying the nation', of loving it, to connect to the quote at the beginning of this section. In more Butlerian terms: the nation is 'performed' in the act of feeling outraged. While not everyone gets to partake in it, two distinct types of enjoyment have emerged: the opponents of Pussy Riot find it in the enactment of outrage and anger. This is not to dispute the emotional reaction or confusion that some may have experienced at first, but this has been amplified wilfully in order to prolong the enjoyment that accompanies these sensations, as there is surely also enjoyment in the deliberate celebration of, or indulgence in affect. Parts of the 'creative class', on the other hand, finds their enjoyment and forms of identification in a celebration of the aesthetics of protest, the appreciation of which it presents only itself as possessing. Both parties are granted a sense of knowing how to protect the national ideal. This, seemingly contradictory location of 'enjoyment' in both groups in fact points to its paradoxical nature, whereby the double meaning of

passionate attachments can imply both a collective celebration of positive affect, as well as a modality of collective complaint and outrage. In fact, it appears that in specific cases a libidinal community can be manufactured almost overnight in light of offence by fostering a solidarity of *jouissance*, of shared suffering or injustice. Russian reactions to Pussy Riot therefore revealed not only the tensions and antagonisms in Russian society generally – they also point to a split at the heart of the intelligentsia, whereby some find enjoyment in the new type of *jouissance* the women represent, while others celebrate their outrage at the group's contempt for traditional values. The next chapter examines how presentational mechanisms around the Russian president's persona seek to elicit a different kind of identification or 'leader love' in the populace.

Chapter VII: Fantastic Mr President: The Masks, Myths and Mirrors of Putinism

Who is Mr. Putin? This question has never been fully answered. (Hill & Gaddy, 2012:1)

Vladimir Putin's image of hyper-accentuated masculinity has garnered a lot of public attention in the West. Some of the President's techniques of image management indeed appear so heavy-handed as to positively invite ridicule, so that commentators frequently assume a stance of ironic distance and critical deconstruction towards this strategy. The abundance and multitude of images, both still and moving, that have been produced during the Putin presidency and his stint as Prime Minister have enabled a great amount of interpretational work: "The most striking aspect of the Putiniana generated during the 2000s, however, is neither its obsequiousness nor its iconoclasm - or even its ludic nature - but the sheer wealth and diversity of Putin images, many of them as "managed" as the "democracy" during his presidency" (Goscilo, 2013:27). This emphasis on spectacle lends itself to an analysis that incorporates notions of the 'pseudo-event' or 'hyperreality' (Boorstin, Baudrillard, Eco) as well as the making of modern myths (Barthes), which have in common a postmodernist concern with a blurring of boundaries between reality and simulation. The primacy of representational mechanisms to all elements of the discourse of Putinism, including its fantasmatic aspects, make this the starting point for this chapter. However, the underlying theoretical concern is how this is linked to processes of identification with a leader or authority figure, as well as later variations on this, such as Adorno's examination of fascist propaganda. There is additional value in studying the Putin myth¹¹⁵, not only to understand which strategies of identification have been mobilised, but also to examine further ways of determining to which degree they have succeeded or failed. At the same time, it is clear that in privileging notions of fantasy, ideology and interpellation the scope of the present analysis will be less restrictive so as to incorporate these concepts, especially given identification's proximity to love.

Instead of following a more conventional format that seeks to answer a specific set of research questions, this chapter is structured around a series of contradictions or

¹¹⁵ Note that the term 'cult', as in 'cult of personality', has been consciously avoided to draw attention away from any simplifying parallels with Soviet or fascist examples.

paradoxes. The chief paradox here is that by investigating the quasi-mythical instantiations of, and fantasmatic discourses surrounding, Putin's persona we are more likely to encounter the investments of Russia and Russians *in* a certain configuration of both authority and Russianness, as embodied in the figure of Putin, or else their complete rejection of both. This is useful for this study, as it links back to the thesis' overarching focus on processes of identification. Further, seemingly mutually exclusive positions that can be encountered are those that view the entire era of Putin and Putinism as a highly ideological age with a coherent vision. Interpretations of the state's ideology range from a quasi-Stalinist set of tenets to a 'managed democracy', with added values and ideas borrowed from Russian Orthodoxy and idealised versions of pre-Revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union, all with a 'neo-traditionalist twist'¹¹⁶.

Those that insist on Putin's ability to rally mass support can point to political polls that continue to verify this (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013). They have sometimes framed him as a populist leader who has provided a cause, or set of causes, around which to gather the support of the Russian public, although without necessarily professing a well established ideological stance. The President's occasional forays into explicit language seem to provide the kind of 'obscene supplement' that, as Slavoj Žižek suggests, is needed to produce *charisma* in a leader. However, in the company of other contemporary political figures in Russia such as opposition leader Alexey Navalny and, more compellingly, his buffoonish alter ego Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Putin is more likely to emerge as a technocrat – unless fantasmatic speculations imbue him with a sinister magnetism. The potential (or incitement) for interpretation has recently resulted in an increasing recourse to an analysis of Putin's character that uses a strongly psychologised language.

Masks, myths and mirrors

It's the hot summer of 2001 [...] Events develop swiftly and completely unexpectedly. The President decides to head out for Chechnya with a spetsnaz squad to destroy the rebels' lair [...] He does this and is the only one left alive.

This is the synopsis of Russian adventure novel *President* published in 2002, featuring Vladimir Putin as its protagonist (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 41). According to Birgit Beumers, the standard Russian cinematic hero of the early 2000s is similarly one that

¹¹⁶ <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/mark-lipovetsky/indiscreet-charm-of-russian-cynic>

invites parallels with Putin: the protagonist is frequently a former KGB-agent and killer who redeems himself through his deeds – deeds which ultimately benefit society (Beumers, 2008). Indeed, it is the figure of Putin that has arguably dominated the public's perception of Russia not only within borders, but also outside them. Public appearances have included him singing and playing the piano at a charity gala, flying a plane to help extinguish the devastating forest fires in the summer of 2010, driving a Russian-made Lada across Siberia, and shooting grey whales with a crossbow.

The epithet 'fantastic' of the chapter's title therefore refers to two things. Firstly, to the public persona of Vladimir Putin, with its emphasis on overall prowess through much-publicised exploits which aim to highlight not only his decisiveness and no-nonsense approach to leading the country, but also his desirability as a man. This perception is strengthened by the Presidential team's unprecedented – for Russian politics – reliance on images, often the result of specifically created PR spectacles, leading some observers to conclude that over the past decade or so "Putin and the Kremlin were in permanent campaign mode" (Hill & Gaddy, 2012:6).

Secondly, the title of this chapter also alludes to the fantasmatic discourses *about* Vladimir Putin, which endow him with a power that far surpasses actuality. These discourses circulate in different guises in Russia and the West, with even those that employ sarcasm and parody representing clear attempts to strip him of that power. The argument presented here is that in order to explain the public preoccupation with the Russian president one has to go beyond a mere citing of the Cold War legacy. The fact that processes of identification require a fantasmatic element in order to get activated links this back to the focus of the thesis, which in part represents an attempt to understand and uncover the links between individual and social fantasy.

The image of "strongman" Putin may have attracted much mockery in the foreign press, however, these comments frequently point to another prevalent element of the discourse of Putinism: a barely concealed suspicion and open disagreement as to the 'real' nature of the President's agenda. To quote from a Russian source, these discourses "claim to find behind the façade of sterile technocracy something like a 'real Putin' with a substantive political project that was, depending on the taste of the observer, either extremely liberal or extremely authoritarian – but always extreme, as if the only way to compensate for the

surface nihilism of Putinite politics was to imagine its 'real' content to be so extreme as to somehow deserve being hidden" (Prozorov, 2009:68). Similarly, to many observers - Anne Applebaum only being one of the more famous proponents (see also Hill & Gaddy, 2013) - Putin's project is seen as profoundly ideological, while a number of Russian scholars conclude the opposite – that what continues under, but historically precedes Putinism, is the “deactivation of the entire ideological field” (ibid.: 76). In fact, a number of Russian commentators and political scientists view Putin as the *президент пустоты* or *President of Emptiness*, thus functioning as the 'mirror', in a society without an ideology beyond consumerism. A President who is all surface appears to reflect subjects' investments and concerns, but does so without presenting any attempt to add his own, and has thus failed to interpellate subjects.

Searching for the real President

The argument around which the present chapter is structured is at first glance paradoxical in nature. It maintains that the public's preoccupations with Putin and his 'true nature' are both misguided and at the same time correct. That is, when the West - and, to a lesser degree, Russia itself - looks to the figure of Vladimir Putin in order to draw conclusions about national sensibilities, this is a naive endeavour, and in fact adds fuel to the force which drives these fantasmatic discourses of Putinism into circulation. There is not much to be gained by trying to fathom the President's 'real' agenda, at least when we want to understand contemporary Russia. While in no way denying the authoritarian, at best pseudo-democratic nature of his regime, the relationship between Putin - or his public persona - and the populace is in fact far more reciprocal than often assumed. Many of the pseudo-events organised by his team of PR advisers seem to represent evidence of the 'collective Putin'¹¹⁷ trying to anticipate 'what Russia wants', perhaps in an attempt to stimulate the kind of identification or leader love that Freud talks about.

The purpose of this chapter is not to uncover or describe the 'real' Vladimir Putin's character or agenda. It concerns itself with the creation of the Putin persona, his “many masks—commander-in-chief, erudite technocrat, the all-knowing, all-seeing eye, and compassionate 'Tsar-batiushka'”¹¹⁸, which are the result of efforts by the President himself, his PR advisers, as well as the collective interpretational work undertaken by the

¹¹⁷ <http://russ.ru/pole/Bolee-luchshe>

¹¹⁸ <http://seansrussiablog.org/2013/05/27/results-from-the-direct-line/>

public in Russia and the West. In short: the ‘masks’ or guises are the essence, rather than what might lurk behind them. In line with postmodern approaches to how public leaders are constructed and perceived by subjects, one may also be tempted to treat the President as a product marketed to, and consumed by, the public¹¹⁹; a notion that is given support not only by the energy put into presentational mechanisms, but also by the amount of cultural output and memorabilia which features him (e.g. Goscilo, 2013). As a result, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin becomes a leader for his time, having come to power at the beginning of the 21st century, an age that claims to be ostensibly post-ideological in its politics (Fukuyama, 1992). At the same time, he heads a country that finds itself in the difficult position of having to assemble an identity which seeks to rescue and combine at times antithetical elements of a largely discredited or ‘failed’ history. The following section will give a brief overview of the last 13 years under Putin, which have seen a marked change in the Russian public’s relationship with its 3-time President and former Prime Minister.

The Putin Years

Now that the figure of Putin is ubiquitous, it is hard to imagine that upon his ascent to the post of Prime Minister and, shortly after, President of the Russian Federation, he seemed to have come out of nowhere. He appeared like a ‘grey cardinal’, having been seemingly groomed for the presidential role by the Yeltsin ‘family’, consisting of President Yeltsin’s close political associates and rich businessmen such as Boris Berezovsky. What seemingly qualified him for the position was more than 15 years of service to the KGB (5 of which – indeed the crucial period of perestroika – had been spent in Dresden in the then-GDR), and a mixed record in various managerial and administrative positions in his hometown of St Petersburg and Moscow, as well as a brief spell as Head of the FSB, the post-soviet successor to the KGB.

Upon entering office as President in 2000, Putin quickly achieved high popularity ratings as his first term brought about a period of stability and economic growth: “Public opinion polls conducted during the first term in office indicate that his approval rating between 2000 and 2004 remained consistently between 70 and 80 per cent [...] after his two terms in office ended in May 2008, a stunning 86 per cent of Russians polled expressions of approval of Putin.” (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 37). This makes for a

¹¹⁹ See for example the ‘Putin Toothpick’
http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/03/08/040308ta_talk_lipman

stark contrast with Yeltsin's 3% approval towards the end of his term - a direct result of the chaos and poverty of the 1990s, which culminated in the country's currency devaluation and default on its debt in 1998, as well as the President's erratic behaviour. Following the maximum 2-terms as President, Putin became Prime Minister in what later turned out to have been a power-sharing deal. Of interest to this chapter is that the - as it was perceived - more liberal and mild-mannered Dmitry Medvedev never reached Putin's level of popularity, with Putin continuing to outpoll other Russian political figures, including Medvedev, by a significant margin. An analysis that is privileged by some commentators on Russia sees this as evidence of the fact that a larger-than-life president is more in line with 'what Russians want', as Putin "satisfied a yearning for a strong leader who could make the Russian family proud"¹²⁰. However, one has to be very careful here to avoid concretising a Russian 'national desire'. Whilst one can concede that Russians throughout history have been exposed to strong leader figures, equating a historical past with an inherent propensity is a dangerous enterprise, as it treats nations and groups as essentially static, prone to repeat the same historical patterns over and over again.

Instead, it is in part the Putin administration's skills in orchestrating PR or pseudo-events which have secured him so firm a position in the national imaginary. The President was initially perceived to be something of a technocrat, but his regime soon displayed a penchant for newsworthy occasions, which highlighted the President's singular determination and prowess. However, a watershed moment seems to have occurred with Putin's announcement of a third candidature for presidency and blatantly rigged parliamentary elections in 2011. This resulted in a wave of anti-government protests, in which Putin's party United Russia received the epithet "Party of Thieves and Crooks", and the President himself becoming a target of much of the public's discontent. Chronologically, this was therefore a very interesting time in which to examine the Putin phenomenon: his approval ratings had fallen and were at their lowest since he became President in 2000¹²¹. At the same time the Western press – in large part due to social media and 'memification' – became more preoccupied with Putin the man and Putin the image, with the two becoming ever harder to distinguish. If, following the point made

¹²⁰ <http://www.boston.com/2012/01/07/russia/tl6p5zMMq7OxLdqFptAnUN/singlepage.html>

Note also the psychoanalytic language employed by the author, whereby the public's disenchantment with Putin is explained in terms of how "a good father can become a bad father".

¹²¹ Though still rather high: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2014/01/13/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-has-been-holding-steady-for-almost-two-years/>

earlier, it is posited that processes of identification take place continuously, that is, a 'taking in' or 'falling in love with' aspects of a person, and for this to include public personae, then it seems justified to ask what it is that has made some of the public fall out of love, or dis-identify with Putin.

Explanations offered for this partial waning of positive emotions towards the President – those that do not rely on notions of identification - include "the global economic crisis and increasingly widespread concerns about the erosion of democracy in Russia" (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 38). In response, Putin is seen to have switched the focus of his rhetoric from the business elite and educated middle-class to a broader base more receptive to populist language. However, a different view offered of the causes of this sudden and explosive expression of discontent with the Putin regime is that in fact "Putin has never been especially strong [...] But he has succeeded in creating a system that is relatively stable because it makes him look much stronger than he actually is"¹²². This implies that the impression of authority and strength was to a large degree just that: an impression. Putin's success lay in managing that impression, and in the specific relationship between post-soviet Russians and the State. Krastev and Holmes argue that, in the experience of Russians born during the USSR and after, rigged elections were indeed the norm and regarded almost as a token of power, at least the power to manipulate outcomes in the one's favour.

An invisible line seems to have been crossed when Putin's run for a third term in office was announced: a cynical distance to politics did not preclude a (perhaps temporary) sense of outrage at being fooled so blatantly. An, always context-specific, sense of propriety had been disturbed through this manoeuvre, which revealed just how gullible the Putin regime required its electorate to be. The government's brutal response to the protests then also demonstrated it to be devoid of legitimacy, that is, credible means to restore faith in its sovereignty: "to destroy a Potemkin village all that is required is to change the camera angle to reveal the improvised props holding up the flimsy façade. [...] What finally ruined the show was that it provided no entertainment either."¹²³ In order words: most were aware that the words 'managed democracy' lean heavily on the first word. Nevertheless, the Putin regime was able to attain a type of consensus with the

¹²² <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2012-02-17-krastev-en.html>

¹²³ *ibid.*

populace, to a significant degree based on the economic stability that accompanied Putin's first two terms in office. Putin and his PR team had manoeuvred him into a position where he seemed not only the most capable, but also the most presentable candidate. However, it appears that the relentless manipulation of his image had left the hollow core all too visible, as will become apparent in the next section.

The President as Spectacle

The Putin administration is not the prime mover of Russian popular culture but rather a part of it (and even, perhaps, a product of it) (Borenstein, 2008:277).

News reports on Russia's state-owned *Pervyi Kanal* (Channel One) frequently follow a similar schema: at a certain point during the programme, a serious sociopolitical problem is presented to the public. President Putin is then shown addressing his Cabinet or a team of experts, either interviewing them in his office or at an official meeting so as to identify the issue's causes and highlight its urgency, or instructing them directly how to deal with the problem. The scenario's narrative framing is so repetitive that it appears intentional, or even scripted. Indeed, after more than 13 years of Putinism it could have transcended this impression and acquired the status of 'cultural schema', that is, the only manner in which news reports are expected to be framed. Other, past 'scripted events' - that is, events that do not occur spontaneously and have been planned with the media in mind - include the President driving a Russian-made Lada across Siberia, finding a pair of ancient amphorae on a diving trip in the Black Sea, and catching a pike weighing 21 kg. What emerged later was that on his journey across Siberia he was in fact accompanied by a large entourage and had changed cars several times, that the amphorae had been placed there prior to his entering the water, and that the pike's reported weight may have been grossly exaggerated¹²⁴.

A typology of events featuring the President would have to allude to the fact that all of them aim to highlight a certain skill or positive facet of his character, often one that falls into the broad category of traditional masculinity (on which more will be said later on). They usually involve the accomplished handling of a prop, or, perhaps more curiously, interaction with animals. Their political or strategic necessity is not always apparent and, as indicated above, their staged nature is either transparently obvious or is revealed later

¹²⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/29/putin-catches-giant-fish_n_3669547.html

on. However, as is usually the case with any type of ‘pseudo-event’, its success is “measured by how widely it is reported...The question, “Is it real?” is less important than “Is it newsworthy?...Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity....” (Waterman, 1999: 15 cited in Mikhailova, 2013: 77). Notably, this quote refers to strategies employed by US politicians, which implies that the multitude of Putiniana – relating here both to the generation of images and the creation of Putin-related artefacts – is a worthwhile object of study, both in how it relates to the time in which it occurs generally, and to its Russian electorate more specifically.

A blurring of boundaries between reality and entertainment in what one could broadly delineate as the arena of political communication, and in many cases a replacement of the former by the latter is characteristic of the late 20th and early 21st century. This has led to the creation of numerous ‘pseudo-events’, some of which the public may no longer discern as such, treating them instead as events in their own right. One consequence is the normalisation of such spectacles as the press conference, or more elaborate events such as Putin’s annual ‘telethon’, during which he responds to questions by the electorate, sometimes for a length of up to 4 hours. At the other end of the spectrum, this blurring of distinctions can also generate a greater cynical distance from politics in general, as the search for any ultimate truth will always be thwarted. It can even create the impression that “in the entertainment industry when there is a sign it seems there isn’t one, and when there isn’t one we believe there is” (Eco, 1986: 53). Symptomatic of this disorientation is the media speculation surrounding a walk the President took in St Petersburg following the funeral of his first judo coach¹²⁵. He ostensibly wished to spend time alone - without bodyguards or the press – in his old neighbourhood, but pictures of Putin on his solitary walk soon flooded the Internet, often accompanied by the question of whether this was actually staged, perhaps to imbue Putin with greater emotional depth, which would link it to several recent occasions on which he was seen shedding tears in public.

The President as Master Signifier

In terms of the chapter’s focus, this begs the question of whether the Putin spectacle is more performance than coherent message, and whether the endless creation of signifieds is not in fact a sign of the signifier’s absence. The Putin brand may well be “a talisman, a

¹²⁵ <http://www.kommersant.ru/news/2251781>

symbol of the Good Life under VVP¹²⁶ " (Goscilo, 2013:13), but one might argue that it has no inherently positive, stable referent either. Indeed, the state-sponsored search for a new, unifying Russian Idea had been officially discontinued in the 1990s (Hill & Gaddy, 2013: 43)¹²⁷. The numerous debates about the intent and meaning behind the staged scenarios are also indicative of a fascination with *presence in absence*. "Works about Putin often focus on the strivings and travails of presidential observers or admirers; the reader glimpses the center of power only briefly, and then from such a limited perspective that the President's nature, actions, and accomplishments remain largely unknowable" (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 46). This means that the persona of the President is both elusive and adaptable. An interpretation of this important facet can go in two parallel, yet disparate directions.

In one, it can be treated as an example of the mirror-like quality of the *prezident pustoty* – whose surface reflects the investments of a society 'without an ideology beyond consumerism' (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 40). The emphasis here remains on serving as a potential figure of identification, but rather than giving this figure a definite set of predicates as was the case for leaders such as Stalin or Lenin, the post-communist, post-modern era requires its leaders to be more oblique to suit individual tastes and fantasies – "Needless to say the use of electoral photography presupposes a kind of complicity: a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known; it offers to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type" (Barthes, 1972/1991:91.). This is strongly reminiscent of Levada's statement that the fascination with Putin lies in his ability to remain obscure. Obscurity here implies the potential for voters to recognise themselves in the politician's image – but in an idealized, heightened form. It is important to strike the right balance between that which is familiar and that which is strange yet desired. Returning specifically to theories of identification, references to the importance of images as well as the emphasis on similarity – on recognizing, or *mis-recognising* oneself point to an identification in the imaginary - the mechanism by which we identify with the "image in which we appear likeable to ourselves" (Žižek, 1989: 105).

¹²⁶ Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin

¹²⁷ Though one might be tempted to read Putin's public appearances and speeches as continued efforts to locate the nation's moral and ideological core. See for example his usage of the term 'spiritual ties' (of the nation) in December 2012, as mentioned in chapter 6.

The second interpretation also stresses the importance of the essential ‘open-endedness’ of the President’s character - beyond the basic coordinates which feature his masculinity, laconicism and decisiveness – but moves the focus away from the need to identify with the leader, and is more hesitant to use comparison with Soviet-era ‘cults of personality’:

The adaptability of the President’s image suggests that the Putin phenomenon is about something other than the actual politician Vladimir Putin. The Putin cult, if indeed we can call it such, flourishes in contemporary Russia not because of what it purports to depict – the strong, national leader who many Russians, beginning in the early 1990s, seem to have felt they needed – but rather because of the forms of communication and the symbolic practices it enables. (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 49)

In line with Oushakine’s (2000, 2007) idea of the recycling of old forms and stylistic conventions in post-soviet Russia – which he links to an institutionalization of the transition and an ‘arrested discursive field’ – contemporary symbolic practices in Russia follow the structure of previous, familiar cultural forms of expression, which are now utilised to promote the “formation of individual identity and desire” (Cassiday & Johnson, 2013: 51).

A third interpretation would side with those commentators that have remarked upon the parallels between the pseudo-events of the 2000s, and acts related specifically to the ‘Cult of Personality’, which reached its apogee during Stalinism. After all, both types of spectacle served to continuously reiterate a leader’s brilliance, albeit in less hyperbolic terms in the case of Vladimir Putin. However, the focus on the more overt parallels neglects the fact that the underlying ‘conditions of possibility’ that produced the two phenomena are different. Both may rely on fantasy scenarios (or the activation thereof), but the public arena in which they occurred is different entirely. In fact, this arena seems to be changing so rapidly that Putin and his team appear to have to devise ever-new variations of spectacle, and of Putin himself, in an attempt to catch the public’s attention. Some of these strategies and instantiations will be discussed in the next sections. They thus build up to a discussion of the investments the – Russian, as well as more generic – public might have in leader figures, and whether it is merely a question of the populace requiring a “Sovereign who will personify the subject and thus relieve it of all of its impossible internal satisfactions” (Swedlow, 2010: 118).

Between hypermasculinity and hyperrealism

In a manner that in many ways rehabilitates Russia's recent and distant past, Putin has positioned himself as a living and breathing representative of a masculine Ideal—and by extension, a signifier of the strong and prosperous nation-state that Russia could potentially become (Nowakowski, 2012: 107).

As briefly indicated in the previous section, political leaders of the 21st century are now relying on a mobilisation of libidinal energy to gain followers ever more openly. This is not to deny that in the 'cults of personality' of the 20th century featured a strong libidinal element among others. Now, however, there is a greater emphasis on the erotic appeal of politicians. This appeal is no longer merely implicit; it is explicitly written on politicians' bodies and entails more openly flirtatious behaviour. In attempts to woo the electorate, the public are positioned as partners in a flirtatious game of 'will we / won't we?'

Candida Yates argues that some - mainly Western - politicians now engage in traditionally feminine techniques of flirtation, emphasising their 'metrosexuality' (Yates, 2010). This is contrasted with the more paternal or patriarchal figures that dominated the political scene in the past. Alongside this first type exist more 'retrosexual' forms of masculinity. Examples she provides include Silvio Berlusconi, Nicolas Sarkozy, and Vladimir Putin – all politicians whose public appearances frequently involve machoesque posturing, placing much more emphasis on physical and sexual prowess. Highlighting a male politician's desirability is discussed by Yates as something of a legitimate, even "hegemonic strategy within the cultural arena of political communication" (Yates, 2010: 282), especially in "the contemporary context of 'post-ideological' party politics (ibid., p.283). However, unlike many Western politicians who have had to tread the fine line between traditional forms of masculinity and the more 'metrosexual' form of flirtatious masculinity outlined by Yates, it is the Russian President in particular who has acquired something of a reputation for his frequent and unusual displays of this rather traditional brand of masculinity¹²⁸.

Yates' argument is reminiscent of the Freudian account of identification, when she posits that the kind of charisma that a successful politician must possess and mobilise is that which is capable of "courting voters and warding off their latent aggression" (Yates, 2010: 287). Here, too, the skilful politician, like the skilful leader in Freud's account

¹²⁸ <http://www.ilpost.it/2012/02/27/lerotismo-di-vladimir-putin/>

(1921) is the one that manages the negative, aggressive aspects. One may recall here that identification and love are close not only in the developmental trajectory of the child, but also with identification becoming a stand-in when love is not possible or foreclosed, here representing a *regressive* form of identification. Political flirtation can therefore be treated as existing along this spectrum, but relying heavily on staged scenarios in the media to achieve its full impact. This argument is further supported by Yates' emphasis on the role of seduction, "and the fantasies, which accompany the 'real not real' quality of its interactions" (Yates, 2010: 287). In other words: it serves one especially well to pay attention to the fantasy scenarios inherent in the political spectacles devised and coordinated by a politician's advisers.

These fantasies are not always of a distinctly sexual nature: they can be interpreted as representations of the unconscious "wish to identify with narratives of mastery" (Yates, 2010: 297). An example that starkly illustrates the almost infantile quality of these representations of masculinity, which here assume an almost dream-like character, is the synopsis of the Russian adventure novel *President* mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. It is safe to assume that the book is not read for its literary merits, but because of the predictable, almost instrumental pleasure it yields. The pleasure is that of identifying with the protagonist who is able to use violence legitimately in his quest for justice. The novel is not about Putin *per se*, and should perhaps be located as part of a tradition of entertainment *products* – the focus here being on consumption – such as US American films that feature the country's President either in danger and being freed by a heroic renegade, or the President himself getting involved in attempts to save the country (such as 1996's *Independence Day*). The figure of the President here appears as a mere fantasmatic vehicle, representing masculinity, power, and altruism – a quality that is admired despite or because of the overt cynicism of much of Russian discourse on and around politics (Pomerantsev, 2011, see also chapter I). In this vein, his pursuit of physical fitness becomes symbolic of mastery of the self as much as of sexuality.

At the same time, publicity exercises that openly sexualise Putin appear to have increased noticeably in recent years, in contrast to the more buttoned-up demeanour of his first term, when he was perceived as something of a technocrat. In the West, this has attracted its fair share of mockery. A telling example is the reaction of Guardian columnist Marina Hyde, who treats the Russian president's occasional, but well-

publicised displays of bare chest as a sort of compulsion or exhibitionist tendency: “if he [President Putin] can find a way of attending to the matter shirtless, I suppose he might have a crack.”¹²⁹ This Western derision is contrasted with the Russian female population’s supposed response to Putin’s displays of masculine prowess. In women, he is seen to inspire adulation, whereas the male electorate is seen to be wishing to emulate him.

Some of the more directly sexualised examples include an online advertisement in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections entitled ‘For the First Time’, which drew a thinly veiled parallel between losing one’s virginity ‘to the right guy’ and voting for Putin upon becoming eligible to vote¹³⁰; a calendar produced by female students of the Moscow State University’s journalism department for his 58th birthday which features them posing in lingerie¹³¹; and the song and video ‘Someone Like Putin’¹³², which may have been sponsored by the Kremlin. It is worth pointing out two things here: not only does Putin prefer to distance himself publicly from such forms of veneration; the lines between retro- and metrosexuality in the arena of political communication can also at times become rather blurred. The latter video in fact invites parallels to the YouTube - video ‘*I got a crush on...Obama*’, which was produced during the 2008 US presidential election campaign and which, though not produced by Obama’s campaign team, was endorsed enthusiastically when it became an online hit.

With this in mind, one may still inquire why this form of masculinity appears to be so timely a publicity device in Russia. Novakowski’s quote from the beginning of this section indicates that the President is being recruited as a kind of personification of the nation, representing a movement away from the chaos and decline of the 1990s and towards strength and a sense of a better future. Eliot Borenstein similarly treats Putinism’s more recent emphasis on this aspect of the President’s persona as a form of ‘compensatory masculinity’: “Putin [...] represents the restoration of long-lost vigor and confidence. The Yeltsin years considerably lowered the bar for the country's next leader: Putin's specific policies and actions arguably matter far less than his reassuring symbolic

¹²⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/lostinshowbiz/2013/aug/22/whales-kim-basinger-peta-vladimir-putin>

¹³⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Noo0lzJILaM#t=12>

¹³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Birthday,_Mr._Putin!

¹³² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK_VsZbZa_s

function as a "real man" who can husband the nation's resources and promise a return to greatness" (Borenstein, 2008:227).

At the same time, this 'retrosexual' or traditional form of masculinity does not preclude the existence and occasional highlighting of a softer, more family-oriented side. In the case of the President, his actual family has remained out of the spotlight almost completely. This makes him a better fit for a more paternal role vis-à-vis the nation, while much media attention is devoted to "Putin's tender attention to animals" (Mikhailova, 2013:75). Examples include him: "praising the horse that carried him across the Siberian steppes, cuddling with puppies and other small animals, feeding a baby elk from a bottle" (ibid.) There are also several incidences of him publicly administering kisses to animals and little children. Mikhailova views this as an indication that the kisses - which can be read as symbolic as much as material acts - are meant to serve to cement his image of "Father of the Nation", albeit as a tender rather than stern patriarch. An alternative reading, however, is that despite the seemingly excessive masculinity of the presidential persona, it incorporates masculine and feminine aspects. One analyst concludes that for his leadership style "the best comparison now may be a transgender cross between the former Argentine leader Juan Perón and his legendary wife, Eva ("Evita")"¹³³. While masculinity is therefore a central facet of the national vision as it is performed by Vladimir Putin, his ambition to stand for, and speak on behalf of all of Russia cannot neglect the nation's 'maternal characteristics'.

Two ways of reading his association with animals present themselves, both of which point to the symbolic range this public relationship can offer. In the first, these tiger cubs and elks could serve as stand-ins for humans, or more generally as a means of expressing emotions that cannot otherwise be shown with human subjects (Hook, 2013), such as certain kinds of nurturing and love. Goscilo, however, disputes this, instead reading the presidential kisses as acts of power: "Putin's kisses target those who are powerless and incapable of reciprocity [...], they sooner imply Putin's exercise of arbitrary power and symbolic possession"(Goscilo, 2013: 200). The second reading sees the frequent encounters with animals, together with the many photographs featuring the President in scenes of unspoilt nature, as intended to imbue him with Russianness. As detailed in

¹³³ <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/nina-l-khrushcheva-examines-the-affinities-between-russia-s-leader-and-argentina-s-post-war-strongman#Y6FZtM27CSX5oPU5.99>

chapter V, nature as a signifier holds special relevance to many, as a site unblemished by history and politics. In the case of Vladimir Putin, this could represent an attempt to transcend associations with specific regimes or even politics more generally:

Though perhaps vulgar for those with more refined tastes, Putin's shirtless forays into the wilderness are seen by many Russians as the picture of vitality - a sharp contrast to the state of the country and that of its drunken resident of the 1990s. (Zonis et al 2011: 72 in Baer, 2013: 166)

The "semiotic chaos of post-Soviet society" (Baer, 2013: 170) left "many Russians searching for a way to define themselves in the absence of an ideological master narrative" (Baer, 2013: 160). New identity configurations therefore often rely on an assemblage of elements from all periods of Russia and Soviet history. The next section explores how the Russian president, too, engages in the practice of bricolage in order to cover the greatest territory in the ideological spectrum.

Spirit of Bricolage

A few months ago there was a huge 'Putin party' at Moscow's most glamorous club. Strippers writhed around poles chanting: 'I want you, prime minister.' It's the same logic. The sucking-up to the master is completely genuine, but as we're all liberated 21st-century people who enjoy Coen brothers films, we'll do our sucking up with an ironic grin....(Pomerantsev, 2011)

An alternative view is that the Putin spectacle – that is, the emphasis on the President's masculinity as well as the public's supposed enthusiastic response to this, are all part of a game in which each of the players wears a series of masks which are donned opportunistically. Thus it is not merely Putin who is assuming a pre-defined role – it is all of Russia, making this an almost reciprocal relationship, whereby each side is attempting to anticipate the agenda of the other.

As mentioned in the introduction, Peter Pomerantsev claims that the Kremlin's ultimate ideology is that of cynicism, or postmodernism incarnated in a political project. Writing an article on the regime's 'puppet master' or chief ideologue Vladislav Surkov, he characterises Putinite Russia as "a world of masks and poses, colourful but empty, with little at its core but power for power's sake and the accumulation of vast wealth."¹³⁴ He continues characterising this as a deliberate "strategy of power based on keeping any

¹³⁴ <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n20/peter-pomerantsev/putins-rasputin>

opposition there may be constantly confused, a ceaseless shape-shifting that is unstoppable because it's indefinable.” However, this obliqueness has also been interpreted in somewhat less Machiavellian terms by some commentators, who feel that Putin acts as “a mirror in which everyone, whether communist or democrat, see what he wants and hopes to see”¹³⁵. Others feel that "Putin stands in for the void in an attempt to conceal the non-identity of the postcommunist order" (Prozorov, 2009:70), that, “if Putinism can be assigned anything like a set of determinate predicates, it could be summed up in terms of an unlimited valorization of capitalism” (ibid.)

What appears certain even from so brief an overview of its perceived characteristics is that Putinism lacks a series of coherent signifiers, which would enable the production of a more rigorous set of tenets to form or produce its ideology. It relies on the figure of Putin – a figure that is itself ‘empty’, that is, consisting of a series of attributes that are modified to adapt to changing times. Elements of Putinism range from imperial notions of all-Russian greatness which hark back both to pre-revolutionary Russia, as well as the rhetoric of the Cold War, to authoritarianism as well as elements of Western-style democracy; from regret and nostalgia for the Soviet Union to an endorsement of capitalism. In the eyes of many observers, the figure of a strong leader such as Putin, in its very idiosyncrasy, is seen as the only potential candidate capable of suturing this incoherent ideological field. Indeed, his larger than life-public persona resonates strongly with the figure of the ‘charismatic leader’ and his ability to mobilise mechanisms of identification described by Freud in his *Group Psychology* (Freud, 1921). The narcissistic dimension of these types of group identification also ties it to the imaginary type of identification as discussed in Chapter II.

Tendencies in the realm of political and cultural identity that have been noted by observers of contemporary Russia can thus be roughly divided into two camps. On the one hand, there are those who group public discourse in the country around such signifiers as nationalism and patriotism. The conclusion is that these are being operationalized to fill the ideological void and political apathy of post-communist Russian subjects. Yet there are also those critics who doubt not only the efficacy of this political project, but also the existence of any coherent agenda by the Putin/Medvedev government:

¹³⁵ http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/elections2000/e0317_1.stm

Right now there is no ideology. The current regime does not have an ideology, as the word ‘stability’ cannot be considered an ideology. They do not have any ideology apart from money. Everyone knows this, and they don’t try too hard to hide it (Lev Rubinstein, 2012).¹³⁶

Pulitzer-prize recipient Anne Applebaum belongs in the former category when she attributes the *content* of Putinism to a firm set of beliefs emanating directly from the president:

‘Times have changed, but the personality and beliefs of Vladimir Putin, the current Russian president, still matter just as much as those of his predecessors – if not more. In a state where authority is still vested in personalities, not in institutions, the Russian president’s vision of his country, his understanding of its history, his training as a KGB officer and his personal experience of life in the Soviet Union now have an incalculable impact on Russia political life.’¹³⁷

While her documentation of Putin’s rise to the power is well researched, her analysis of the *ideology* of Putinism suffers from a serious flaw. The basic tenet is one of wanting to hold on to power, an idea in whose service the country’s main institutions have been manipulated, intimidated or modified. What fails to emerge from this analysis is any kind of positive content that would be secured through this maintenance of power – unless we posit that cratocracy is itself a sufficient ideological base. The recruitment of the Russian Orthodox Church and the reliance on ‘traditional family values’ – as well as the persecution of those propagating, or seen to propagate other lifestyles, has always felt rather accidental even to Russian commentators. The fact that 20th century Russian and Soviet history was characterized by a series of cataclysms, and, most recently, the ‘non-period’ (Prozorov, 2009) of the 1990s means that the attempt to create a sustained yet positive narrative of historical progress is thwarted by the inevitable negative flotsam attached to any seemingly positive event. What has been salvaged so far is the heroic sacrifice and victory of World War II, and more vague references to the imperial and cultural glory of the Tsarist Russia.

Thus, while Applebaum insists that the “underpinnings of Putinism are in fact quite sophisticated and are becoming more so with time” (Applebaum, 2013), thereby denying the haphazard or even anti-ideological nature that Russian commentators have been so keen to point out, Russian analysts claim that:

¹³⁶ <http://www.rusrep.ru/article/2012/05/28/rubinshtein/>

¹³⁷ Page 1 of speech given at LSE IDEAS: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/reports/pdf/su13-2-putinism.pdf>

Stylistically, Putin may easily be considered a conservative, a reformist and a revolutionary all at once, just as the substantive programme of his presidency lends itself to similarly multiple characterizations as liberal, nationalist and socialist. Thus, if there is such a thing as ‘Putin’s ideology’ (Chadaev, 2005), it is self-consciously syncretic, combining the master signifiers from the entire ideological field (‘freedom’, ‘social justice’, ‘strong state- hood’, etc.) in a bland ‘catch-all’ political discourse (Prozorov, 2009:65).

If we therefore accept the claim that Putinism lacks a coherent ideology and secures power merely for the sake of power, then its means of maintaining sovereignty have been ensured elsewhere. The regime is clearly unable to interpellate subjects on the basis of a national vision or idea, the search for which has remained inconclusive. One such means is the use of force, meaning that: “Cratocracy can surely threaten its subjects with use of force or even actualize this threat in exemplary acts of violence. What it can never do is govern its subjects insofar we understand government in the Foucauldian sense of positive and productive use of power” (Prozorov, 2009:209).

While Putin’s regime has not shied away from the occasional and demonstrative use of force – notable examples being the arrests and imprisonment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, members of Pussy Riot, and the Bolotnaya Square protesters – this does not account for his popularity with voters. Much of it can perhaps be explained by the long-lasting period of economic stability associated with his presidency, as well as the lack of viable alternatives. However, the above describes attempts by the President and his PR team to enter the Russian popular imaginary. While some of the positive public responses may be filed away as cases of opportunistic pandering, equally, in many instances of openly expressed admiration for the President, no material or even social rewards can explain them.

“A composite of King-Kong and the suburban barber”

A muse for men as well as a far from obscure object of desire for women (Goscilo, 2013:9).

One facet of Putin’s persona that has received less attention so far in this discussion is that of the populist leader – another feature he is seen to share with Berlusconi. Examples of his forays into obscene and vulgar language include the promise to ‘finish

(*Chechen - MB*) terrorists in the crapper’ in his days as Prime Minister¹³⁸, to a more recent instance, again evoking unorthodox ways of punishing Chechen rebel fighters:

When, a couple of years ago, a Western journalist asked him an awkward question about Chechnya, Putin snapped back that, if the man wasn’t yet circumcised, he was cordially invited to Moscow, where they have excellent surgeons who would cut a little more radically than usual.¹³⁹

These ‘outbursts’ – recruiting the Russian ‘national other’ of the Muslim separatist, and combining it with sadistic and darkly sexual imagery – occur very sporadically, but always attract media attention – the other type of incident being that of Putin publicly telling risqué jokes (see Hill & Gaddy, 2013). While it may in part be related to the violence of the past that has remained unexorcised from contemporary Russian discourses (see chapter VI), it appears to be employed with strategic intent. But why would the Russian president see the need to “embellish his thuggish image” (Hill & Gaddy, 2013: 137)?

One prevalent explanation sees the deployment of populist rhetoric as a way of strengthening bonds with the community; that it is in fact tailored to appeal specifically to its ‘ordinary’ members and “prepared in advance in conformity with the Russian ‘national character’”¹⁴⁰. In the case of Putinism, however, and in contrast with Ernesto Laclau’s more optimistic take on the phenomenon of populism as serving to create new political identities (2005), the President’s tightly choreographed publicity stunts and linguistic ‘mishaps’ in fact serve to encourage a move away from politics, as a way of continuing and maintaining the depoliticisation which commenced in the late Soviet period (e.g. Yurchak, 1997).

Populism can attach itself to any number of demands – in fact its reliance on ‘empty signifiers’ is one of Laclau’s core assumptions, but in Putinism, this demand emanates from the presidential administration itself, and represents an attempt to discourage political participation and potential dissent. Thought of in this vein, the potpourri of values drawn upon by Putin and his advisors is not intended to represent a coherent set of tenets, but chiefly aims to create an emotional effect, discouraging further analysis,

¹³⁸ See Wikipedia entry on origin of the expression:

http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9C%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%8C_%D0%B2_%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B5

¹³⁹ <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n14/slavoj-zizek/berlusconi-in-tehran>

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n14/slavoj-zizek/berlusconi-in-tehran>

which is easily achieved in a rhetorical move such as that of enunciating what cannot be said, in a manner that is normally taboo.

Russian observers have noted that Putin's regime is in fact becoming more openly populist with time¹⁴¹, following a disenchantment with the elites that Putin was previously able to rely on. First indicators are an increased recourse to Soviet symbolry, by which he is seen to be appealing to those that hanker after the 'glory days of yonder' – those citizens who had lost the most with the breakup of the Soviet Union. In other words "the losers below, 'the silent majority of Russians', who are 'mostly atomised, middle-aged individuals, beaten-down, unheroic philistines trying to make ends meet as decently as they can', after twenty years of betrayed expectations."¹⁴² According to Žižek, "the popular movement *needs* the identificatory figure of a charismatic leader"(Žižek, 2006:557). Indeed, Putin's leadership qualities have often been commented upon, with Sakwa referring to Max Weber's comments on charisma when speaking of Putin:

Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint. The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His charismatic vision breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent (Weber, quoted in Sakwa, 2004: 249).

However, if all of a 'popular movement's' coherence and content are provided by its leader figure, then this also proves to be its weakest point. Putin may be the 'master signifier' that brings together the disparate, at times haphazard elements of Russianness and fuses them into the (non)ideology of Putinism, but the public's rejection of Putin then also leads to the disintegration of this vision. With everything intentionally hinging on the figure of the President, a turn to theories of identification therefore seems apt.

The President as Father and Brother

As outlined at the beginning of this thesis, one of its methodological aims is to explore and reveal the affective, that is, libidinal bonds underpinning community. In fact, it is suggested that a structural dislocation, followed by a period of stasis or indeed latency, can make these bonds visible. Keeping this in mind when returning to the crucial role of the figure of Putin in the post-Soviet social imaginary, it may indeed be the case that:

¹⁴¹ http://slon.ru/world/novyy_rezhim-994537.shtml

¹⁴² <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n02/perry-anderson/russias-managed-democracy>

[..] everything turns around the key notion of identification, and the starting point for explaining a plurality of socio-political alternatives is to be found in the *degree* of distance between ego and ego ideal (Laclau, 2005:62).

Taking as its starting point the Freudian account of identification and its role in group formation and –coherence, Laclau goes on to assert that a leaderless society is in fact impossible; a conclusion which was echoed by Žižek’s earlier comment. At the same time, a group or community cannot sustain its existence through leader-love alone: “a durable group whose only libidinal tie is love for the leader, is equally impossible” (Laclau, 2005:82). Freud insisted that a group requires a “double kind of tie”, that is “identification, and putting the object in the place of the ego ideal (Freud, 1921:96)”. Despite identification’s proximity to love (as discussed in Chapter II), they are therefore nevertheless distinct processes which take place simultaneously. The artificial separation of them – especially along gendered lines of female desire to have, and male desire to emulate as indicated in the quote at the beginning of this section – remains unconvincing.

The leader needs to find ways of appealing to the group that will put him both in charge and in the midst of its members, so as to be both *of* and above them. How might one understand this dual identity? In Laclau’s words “his identity is split: he is the father, but also one of the brothers” (Laclau, 2005:59). However, this paternal role has been assessed in two different ways. In Laclau’s take, group membership makes him ‘accountable to the community’, so that identification in fact suppresses authoritarian impulses and creates “a far more democratic leadership than the one involved in the notion of the narcissistic despot” (Laclau, 2005:60). Adorno, too, argues that the bond underlying group identification centres around the figure of the leader, but rather than seeking to exonerate the populist leader from the accusation of despotism, his focus is on the fascist leader. In his analysis, the primary identification with a powerful, authoritarian father figure that takes place in fascist regimes is linked to a kind of regression or return to more archaic or ‘primitive’ state. The paternal leader figure here resembles the primal father for whose murder the ‘primal horde’ is then forever trying to make amends.

The group members’ commonalities with the leader then do not serve to quell the dictatorial tendencies in him – they are merely evidence of the narcissistic aspects of

group identification: “While appearing as a superman, the leader must at the same time work the miracle of appearing as an average person, just as Hitler posed as a composite of King-Kong and the suburban barber” (Adorno, 1951/2001: 141). In fact, a highlighting of the leader’s heroic, superhuman qualities can therefore never fully bypass the imaginary (in a Lacanian vein), that is, rivalrous aspects of identification: “for the sake of those parts of the follower's narcissistic libido which have not been thrown into the leader image but remain attached to the follower's own ego, the superman must still resemble the follower and appear as his “enlargement””(Adorno, 1951/2001: 142). Barthes’ analysis of the techniques employed to secure voter appeal in electoral photography, which was briefly referred to in an earlier section, confirm as much: the politician needs to be both familiar, and “exalted, superbly elevated” (Barthes, 1972/1991:91) Nevertheless the leader figure, in Adorno’s analysis, is not impervious to historical contingency: while the authoritarian element may be more pronounced under fascism, it decreases in importance in a less repressive society. What remains is the need to convey an “impression of greater force and of more freedom of libido” (Freud, 1921 in Adorno, 1951/2001: 142) than the rest of the community.

Thought of in terms of theories of identification, a somewhat exaggerated identity becomes necessary if the leader is to be accepted as such. However, the amalgam of ordinary and extraordinary components needs to be prepared carefully to suit the national tastes, as these tastes are subject to change. The constant attempts by Putin and his advisors to present new impressive facets of his persona implicitly demonstrate an understanding of this fact, however, they also give evidence of how much the President is still searching for means to secure his appeal. More recently, this reliance on publicity stunts has attracted increasing derision in Russia:

The Russian people have currently reached a stage at which they are ready to settle the question of whether Mr Putin is the Lord’s emissary on Earth. Vladimir Vladimirovich himself keeps silent about this and most likely has not yet arrived at a specific conclusion. On the one hand, Putin and his congregation do agree that he is infallible like God, and that a critique of his person counts as a deadly sin. Truly, his actions, too - like those of God - are hard to grasp for the human mind.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ <http://vestnikcivitas.ru/docs/1628>

This has led to the question of whether national sensibilities have changed in a way that is not accounted for by Putinism. After all, besides economic stability, the system relies wholly on its figurehead, and when the public shows signs of Putin-fatigue, this might point to increasing detachment and disidentification.

From Collective Putin to Concrete Putin

Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to ask you: if Putin is such a louse or nit, then who are we? If we are so clever, magnificent and wonderful, then how come that for 12 years we have been unable to get the better of such a trifling opponent¹⁴⁴?

The President on the Couch

One symptom of the President's lessening credibility is speculation regarding his state of body and mind. Where previously some of the excesses of Putin adulation - such as the small religious sect based outside Moscow, which has elevated Putin to sainthood - may have attracted ridicule¹⁴⁵, in 2013 commentators were actively involved in metaphorically stripping the President so as to inquire about his physiology and psychology. This found its perhaps most extreme expression – following rumours that the President had had to cancel an international trip due to back problems – in a journalist asking: “[...] but tell us: does Putin shit?”¹⁴⁶

The more recent shift in the Russian discourse of Putinism is also illustrated by media reactions to a drawing, which the President produced during a visit to a school in the Urals on the annual ‘Day of Knowledge’ on September 1st 2013. His rather crude drawing was meant to represent ‘a cat from behind’, and while the strained effort to uncover a hidden meaning in the image – a meaning that would provide the public with a deeper understanding of Putin himself – is characteristic of earlier periods, the fact that the most prevalent interpretations indicated the presence of unresolved psychological issues, was not¹⁴⁷. When a psychologist was invited to comment on the President's psyche based on the drawing, he came to the following conclusions:

¹⁴⁴ [Akunin Chkhartishvili](http://www.politonline.ru/rssArticle/15348101.html), 22.08.2012, Facebook posted later re-posted on <http://www.politonline.ru/rssArticle/15348101.html>

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/putin-sekte-in-russland-heiliger-wladimir-bitte-fuer-uns-a-788824.html>

¹⁴⁶ http://polit.ru/article/2012/10/26/sverh_putin/

¹⁴⁷ <http://newsru.com/russia/03sep2013/putincat.html>

First of all, one could mention that here is a person who [...] avoids contact with other people [...] a loner” [...] Second, there is indication of some attempts at originality [...], but merely attempts, this person does not actually have any outstanding creative abilities, but wants to demonstrate something unusual.¹⁴⁸

Finally, and despite Putin’s own best efforts, his drawing style was also seen to be “characteristic of people who are not very certain in their manliness, or don’t see themselves as particularly manly individuals.”¹⁴⁹ Perhaps in line with this suggestion, there had around the same time been several very public displays of feeling (or sentimentality) by the President, when he was filmed shedding tears during his inauguration, and later during the performance of a popular song from the Soviet era.

In the present chapter’s line of argumentation, this emotive performance is not seen as indicative of any ‘true’ emotion, but rather as the launching of a new facet of Putinism. The response to a sentimental Soviet-era song, as well as the increased recourse to Soviet symbols points to an attempt to reconstruct Putin as a man of the people. However, this reconceptualization carries the inherent danger of making the President all too flawed because all too human, in other words: not enough of the ‘superman’ and too much of the neighbour, with all the tensions this entails. With shrinking distance to the populace comes a loss of his previous air of invulnerability, or rather a loss of its pretense, so that a trend away from idealisation to humanisation opens up the possibility of replacing one – now simply ordinary – politician by another.

In order to conceal what is in essence a lack of faith in one’s *symbolic mandate* (see Chapter II), more directly authoritarian measures such as mass arrests have therefore been applied by the government. These, however, only serve to highlight further the regime’s inability to fully ‘govern’ its citizens in the Foucauldian sense. The other type of response to the President’s waning popularity and credibility has been a reliance on the type of spectacle that is traditionally used to create a temporary sense of solidarity as it hails all subjects as part of the national body: the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014. The simultaneous self-presentation as strict but merciful ruler, which Putin seeks to convey with the amnesty of political prisoners such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky and 2 members of Pussy Riot - whose prison terms had incidentally been close to completion – appears to belong

¹⁴⁸http://tvrain.ru/articles/vrach_psiholog_o_risunke_putina_hvost_koshki_fallicheskij_simvol_tak_risujut_odinokie_ljudi_pretendujuschie_na_originalnost-351287/

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

to a different period of Putinism altogether, illustrating the constant quest to performatively secure an identity configuration that turns the President into an object worthy of identification.

Conclusion

The increasing impression that Putin – along with the rest of political life in Russia - is more simulacrum than reality has been reinforced by the presence of one of his sharpest critics, who maintains an entirely virtual presence. Lev Sharansky is a ‘virtual dissident’¹⁵⁰ created by an anonymous blogger to continue a politics of opposition in the vein of Soviet dissidents through his frequent appeals to morality, along with calls to defend human rights and freedom of expression. While still holding dominion over state violence as a last resort, Putinism’s hyperreal President is thus confronted with a hyperreal adversary. The ever-changing masks of the President – despite their unquestionable appeal, in large part due to their ease of communicability, reveal a hollow core. The meandering between more exaggeratedly heroic and more human guises point to an essential instability at the heart of Putin’s public persona. It is difficult to determine whether this was driven by a change in national sensibilities, or indeed originates in the government, but the consequences in both cases are akin to a ‘naked emperor—effect’.

Constructing Vladimir Putin as the master signifier of Putinism established a need for a figurehead that was sufficiently empty to appeal to a number of societal groups or classes. However, the absence of a more ideological and less personified *point de capiton* or ‘quilting point’ meant that the Putin regime was also inherently reliant on processes of identification in order to secure its place in the national body. At the same time, attempting to secure such lasting libidinal bonds in a changing society is a risky enterprise – what may have seemed impressive at one time can seem worthy of ridicule in another, at that point only serving to further alienate him from the populace. The non-ideological, personalised edifice that is Putinism thus contains the seeds of its own failure, and it is only a matter of time until it becomes even more apparent that “though subjectification occurs by means of symbolic identifications, this identification itself is not only false, it is a hindrance to the subject in terms of living a fully authentic life” (Swedlow, 2010: 118).

¹⁵⁰ <http://lev-sharansky2.livejournal.com/>

Chapter VIII: Moments of Russianness - Conclusion.

This thesis investigated processes of national identification, applying psychosocial methodology to discourses produced in Russia during the period of Putinism. Its starting point was a body of scholarly literature claiming an absence of symbolic functions or subjective formations, which could provide the post-Soviet subjects with identificatory positions (Oushakine, Prozorov). This is coupled with a lack of existing empirical work examining national identification utilising a psychosocial approach. The research fills this lacuna by looking for moments of identification across different texts, such as interviews, surveys and media representations. The identifications encountered in the thesis are precarious and marked by tension, speaking of the loss of a fantasy of the ideal nation, and of an internalisation of images and scenes borrowed from literature and history. The study also offers a consideration of the implications of such attachments for Russian society, highlighting the crucial interdependence of psychic and social realms, whose intersection is most acutely apparent in discourse.

This final chapter will outline the study's major findings across three main trajectories. The first focuses on the thesis' methodological and theoretical contributions. While the tropes and discursive operations identified in the thesis are fundamental to how certain parts of the populace make sense of their Russianness, the thesis did not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of Russian subjectivities in the early 21st century. Instead, it examined how, in relation to the nation, certain discourses are constructed and reproduced, and what can be gleaned about the meaning and function of these recurrent tropes and patterns. One of the most surprising findings of the thesis is the prevalence of image-rich discourses and signifiers. Not only do they assume a pivotal role in imaginary identification, recent events in Russia also point to how the construction of mythological narratives not only structures subjects' *perception* of reality - for some, it has an impact on how they seek to structure reality itself.

The second, related point will foreground how each of the thesis' four empirical chapters makes a separate yet conjunctive contribution. Each chapter assumes a distinct vantage point, whose findings will be laid out in some detail. At the same time, it is emphasised how they share theoretical concerns, thereby providing further insight into a number of aspects of the same phenomenon of national identification. This naturally also involves reviewing the study's methodological challenges, as well as pointing to potential future

directions for research. Thirdly and finally, the conclusion will devote some space to the issue of temporality and temporal location of the researcher. Most of the discourses analysed in the thesis were produced between 2010 and 2013, thus predating the events of this year. Highlighting the thesis' relevance thus also entails making a connection to the developments of 2014.

Theoretical and empirical contributions

Split subjectivities

The introduction gave an account of the discursive conditions of (im)possibility for national identification in Russia of the 21st century. One of its main arguments was that that by focusing on processes of national identification, rather than nationalism or national identity, it is possible to gain insight not merely into how and where national signifiers are reproduced, but which signifiers are privileged and to what degree they are assumed by subjects. This is especially pertinent in the case of a discursive backdrop marked by a 'crisis of group-identification' (Leonova, 1999). Post-soviet Russia was here described as shaped by a type of discursive paralysis or 'aphasia' (Oushakine, 2000) in the field of cultural and ideological production, facilitating a continued recycling of archaic signifiers. The emptier or more open-ended a signifier is found to be, the greater its potential to harbour a myriad of meanings and connotations. At the same time, the resulting situation of social dispersion and withdrawal from the public sphere was exacerbated by multiple layers of cynicism afflicting the post-Soviet subject. The lack of signifiers anchoring subjects in the present also enabled the gulf between intelligentsia and the majority of Russians to expand to the degree where they appear to be speaking from entirely separate discursive realms.

After this survey of the discursive field of post-Soviet Russia, Chapter II gave an overview of theories of identification, with the latter part of the chapter in particular devoted to identification in groups and the community. This process was shown to be both ambivalent and inherently precarious, involving feelings of love as well as aggression, attempts at emulation as well as rivalry. Identification was stressed to be a process rather than a psychic or discursive fact. It represents a continuous approximation by subjects to *be like* the other, or incorporate the other into themselves (i.e. *have* the other). In its final sections, the chapter also spoke of the structures and detours some types of identification can assume in

response to specific historical and societal conditions. Chapter III (*Reading formations of national identification*) then introduced strategies of investigating modes and vicissitudes of attachments to the nation encountered in discourse. While the original methodological focus of the research lay on discourse analysis, ultimately a more distinctively psychosocial reading methodology was developed. The type of methodology applied to the thesis incorporates influences such as the analysis of political discourse introduced by Laclau and Mouffe, together with the more psychoanalytic reading offered by Stavrakakis. Overall, the analysis of discursive strategies encountered during the research entailed a thematic ordering of discursive motifs particularly charged with affect, as well as an examination of the function of specific recurrent patterns. The psychosocial form of analysis performed in the thesis necessitated greater flexibility in order to be able to identify moments when the subject feels it coincides with the signifier, and to delineate what characterises such moments of seeming authenticity. Conversely, it also sought to determine when and why the gap between oneself and the signifier is felt most acutely. In chapters II and III, the battery of signifiers structuring subjects' self-representation was crucially divided into those making up the "image in which we appear likeable to ourselves" (Žižek, 1989:105), as is relevant in the process of *imaginary* identification, and the place from which subjects believe they are being viewed and judged, as is salient in *symbolic* identification.

The first part of the thesis' empirical element, chapters IV and V, illustrated how the process of splitting demarcates subjects' relationship to Russianness.

Indeed, this split subjectivity – wanting to elevate those features that make up one's identity, together with a contradictory desire to denigrate all that is Russian, is one of the characteristic features of the discourse of Russianness among this cohort of educated urban Russians. Respondents denigrated the nation at hand, but expected the 'ideal nation' to make itself loveable. This resulted in the parallel presence of a good and a bad nation in subjects' accounts, so that what was perceived as worthy of love could be retained and internalised, while the 'worthless' Russia was expelled. The celebration or fetishisation of elements of a remembered and imagined history was fundamental to how many respondents constructed Russianness, but the unavailability of these components simultaneously thwarted any attempts at constructing an identity that would be moored in present-day Russia. In conjunction with the sense of disorientation, some texts suggested that the discursive enactment of disidentification could serve as a solution to the problem of such a 'wounded attachment'. Fantasmatic identification with signifiers

from film and literature enabled the creation of a series of ‘private Russias’, which could be seen as further empirical and theoretical elaborations of Santner’s original concept (1996).

Myths of Russianness

In fact, one of the study’s distinctive contributions concerns the pivotal role of images and symbols in discourse, thus challenging Michael Billig’s critique of the “over-evaluation of the visual modality in much western philosophy and psychology (Billig, 2006:16)”. As mentioned in the previous section, it was frequently the aspects of Russianness located in the realm of aesthetics and culture that were deemed capable of inspiring affective investment. Characters and scenes from Russian novels and films were identified with *fantasmatically*, being first deemed worthy of identification, and then retroactively established as distinctly Russian. The survey element asking participants to comment on a series of pictures and photographs (Appendix G) responded specifically to this tendency, which had been established through the interview analysis. However, in an unexpected development, bar one picture (‘Young pioneers in Moscow’), responses were less affective than expected. Instead, respondents came with their own plethora of images and scenes.

Reasons for this willing citation of images and imaginary contents are two-fold. The first relates to the prelapsarian belief held by some interviewees that true (meaning: lovable) Russianness existed in the past, after which it was lost through historical change or a similar ‘fall’. Enabling this idealised relationship to the past required a disavowal of the problematic aspects of Russian and Soviet history, in order to be able to hold on to, and fetishise, a certain version that can be integrated more easily into fantasy. The images cited provide ego-substantiating contents that can support a form of imaginary identification in the face of a lack of such signifiers in actuality. Crucially, it is only by introducing psychosocial ideas that this facet of subjects’ relationship with discourse could be adequately theorised. By not looking simply to discourse, or utilising notions of nationalism, but rather grappling with so crucial a dimension of identification, it becomes possible to understand what ties the subject to the community, even in the face of denial of such bonds. These affectively sustained images and scenes have an important libidinal function, and work in conjunction with discourses and ideology.

Second, accessing such image-rich discourses also enables respondents to partially manage the challenges of defining one's relationship to the nation in words. This was alluded to in greater detail in chapter III. This distinctive sub-facet of the representational dynamics in question, which function often in a quasi-mythical way, was also evident in the recurrence of nature as a signifier. Its ability to accommodate a multiplicity of meanings accounts for its power and continued relevance. However, as it is partially sought out due to being regarded as untarnished by history and politics, it cannot easily interpellate subjects on behalf of society, thus offering no resolution to Russia's doubly acute 'crisis of investiture'. At the same time, the continued existence of an ideal Russia is guaranteed by such seductive signifiers slotting into mythological narratives in circulation.

The notion of *Nachträglichkeit* provided one way of referring to the ways the past is continuously reworked in the service of accommodating memory and experience. In fact, recent events suggest that in post-Soviet Russia the borders between truth and fiction are even more porous than was assumed. It seems as if fiction has seeped into, and moulded Russian actuality, though this process is not exclusive to Russia. In fact, it made be a response more generally to conditions in which an impasse of national identification has occurred. One example is the myths of the heroism and sacrifice of the Second World War, which gave the Soviet Union one of its few universally acknowledged moments of glory, celebrated in numerous historical and fictional accounts and films. Soviet and Russian authorities have always been keen to co-opt this moment and elevate to the status of a national success. However, this facet of the 'collective consciousness' of Russia has been shown to have palpable consequences. Indeed, some observers of contemporary Russian have been keen to point out how such war myths fuel the separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, despite none of its participant having any personal recollection of the War¹⁵¹. In an even more surprising connection, several of those actively involved in the separatist movement or in charge of producing propaganda war on the Russian side are authors of fantasy literature – a hugely popular genre in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia¹⁵². This led popular writer Dmitry Bykov to say with intentional hyperbole:

¹⁵¹ http://m.gazeta.ru/politics/2014/07/25_a_6146089.shtml

¹⁵² Separatist leader and Head of *Donetsk People's Republic* Igor Strelkov published a series of military fantasy novels, while his former right-hand man Fyodor Berezin in fact published an alternative history novel called *War 2010- The Ukrainian Front*.

This is above all a literary war, unleashed by writers, and without having taken into account the interests of the readership.[...] Fantasy literature has played the role of our almost non-existent futurology. It has taken it upon itself to develop new projects for the nation, and as we can see, it has been highly successful¹⁵³.

Bykov claims that while most highbrow Russian authors turned their back on Russian politics, these ‘literary futurologists’ spent more time and resources than anyone else imagining Russia’s geopolitical future, relying on one of contemporary Russia’s most robust and long-standing myths. Indeed, the hyperrealism that marks much of Russian contemporary political life, with its virtual presidents and dissidents, together with the potential of discourse to transform latent identifications into those that insist on avowal, is present in both chapters making up the second part of the thesis’ empirical element.

Pussy Riot as a symptom of Putinism

Judith Butler’s idea of taking injury on behalf of another as a possible indicator of identification was addressed in chapters II and V (Butler, 1990). It posits that in the case of ‘injurious identification’, one is only able to leap to the object’s defense when it is openly mocked or insulted by others, even when previously not having been aware of this ‘vulnerable place’ in oneself. Those actively supporting the verdict or other forms of punishment against Pussy Riot similarly felt that the precious pillars of propriety holding the nation in place were endangered. On the other hand, those defending the women in the name of political and artistic freedom saw in them an alternative vision of Russia, so far existing mainly as a possibility when not enacted in such performances.

When first writing about Pussy Riot in 2012 and 2013, I therefore considered the treatment and reception of the group as a symptom or indication of the desire to ‘enjoy the nation’. In participating in the debate, Russians sought to achieve this enjoyment in two wholly disparate ways: either in rejection of all that the group is seen to represent, or in a celebration and elevation of the women and their work. Liudmila Borusyak (2012) seemed justified in saying that a more stable society would have been able to tolerate the potential ‘danger’ that Pussy Riot represents, but in these volatile times, it was relatively easy to present one of the many acts of protest as a threat to the very foundations of the

¹⁵³ <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/64337.html>

nation. However, this is not to say that Pussy Riot was selected as an arbitrary target for attention and punishment. The disconcerting nature of their particular configuration of femininity, together with their brazen criticism of the country's two major authorities, provided a perfect target. For the group's opponents, their public displays of protest represent a form of 'stolen enjoyment', from which they themselves were barred and to which the only reaction possible was therefore one of a rejection that demands punishment. Opponents and supporters of Pussy Riot encountered a form of temporary unity in these wounded attachments, fostered by a solidarity of *jouissance*. This also provided further evidence for the paradoxical nature of enjoyment, whereby the double meaning of passionate attachments can imply both a collective celebration of positive affect, as well as a modality of collective complaint and outrage. Russian reactions to Pussy Riot therefore revealed not only the tensions and antagonisms in Russian society generally – they also pointed to a split at the heart of the intelligentsia, whereby some find enjoyment in the new type of *jouissance* the women represent, while others celebrate their outrage at the group's contempt for traditional values.

Temporality

In contrast to Western commentators, a number of Russian scholars insisted that Vladimir Putin's popularity is not deeply connected to his persona, instead merely representing economic stability and a decisive turn away from the difficult 1990s. His persona's indeterminacy was presented either as responsible for the system of Putinism's inability to truly govern subjects in a Foucaultian sense (Prozorov, 2005, 2009) or as productively open-ended and thus able to contain a multitude of investments¹⁵⁴. In other words: the absence of a more ideological and less personified *point de capiton* meant that the Putin regime was inherently reliant on processes of identification in order to secure its place in the national body. Positioning Putin as such a master signifier to tie together the free-floating meanings and symbols of post-1990s Russia was presented as an inherently unstable project, as what may have seemed impressive at one time could seem worthy of ridicule in another, at that point only serving to further alienate the President from the populace.

The non-ideological, personalised edifice of Putinism was therefore seen to contain the seeds of its own failure. Putin's leadership style was treated as an appeal to the nation, or

¹⁵⁴ http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/elections2000/e0317_1.stm

as its personification. Despite or because of the regime's authoritarian nature – which in part was able to rely on the all-pervasive cynicism towards political figures - Putin's leadership needed to be supplemented with personal charisma. With the effect of the famous age of stability of early Putinism wearing off, and the global financial crisis' increasing impact on citizens' lives, the chapter noted attempts to become more loveable. The President's more recent show of emotions, whether authentic or not, was read as a clear attempt to humanise him, simultaneously and inadvertently making him more vulnerable to more personalised speculation and attacks by the press.

Revisiting these observations from the temporal location of 2014, with Putin's approval ratings at an all-time high of 83%¹⁵⁵, it now appears that a more effective way of suturing the split in Russian society has since been found. To achieve this, the government relies less on the President as the sole master signifier, and more on ways of turning these inherent tensions outward. Indeed, the surge of patriotism that followed the annexation of Crimea and subsequent armed conflict in Ukraine may have secured Putin's reign for another term. The newly drafted social contract no longer merely agrees to provide relative economic stability to enable consumption for obedient, apolitical subjects. Rather, it gratifies the longing for moments of national greatness and unity by literalising the notion of a "theft of enjoyment": the beautiful peninsula with its resorts and Mediterranean climate had been 'cruelly' given away by Khrushchev in 1954, only to be returned to its rightful owners – the Russian people – by Putin's government in 2014. Lev Gudkov, together with colleagues from *Levada-Center*, illustrates how the antagonisms of Russian society have been effectively channelled in a process of 'negative mobilization'¹⁵⁶, whose targets are in turn influenced by the existence of anti-Western myths:

In the Spring of this year, the negative mobilization of Russian society ensured that social tensions were [safely] channelled, and re-established the legitimacy of the Putin regime by transforming discontent with his leadership into hostility towards the West (and Ukraine). Soviet myths about the essential difference between "the West" and Russia", and the inevitability of confrontation between the two cultures, have been revived along with a sense of the impossibility not only of convergence, but of "modernization" in line with western models of development. The West appears, just as it did 40 years ago, in the form of a symbolic opponent, an "enemy" posing a threat to the

¹⁵⁵ According to a poll conducted by Levada-Center: <http://www.levada.ru/eng/>

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-10-01-gudkov-en.html>

very existence of Russia and to Russian values, traditions and "national interests" (all of which conceals the anxiety of a despotic and corrupt leadership about maintaining power).

It is important to remember here that the antagonisms and tensions of Russian society have not been resolved. They have merely been given new targets in the service of nationalistic sentiment, which requires the spectre of ever-new enemies. The intelligentsia, too, has once more found itself in a marginalised position it had not occupied since the 1980s, with the group now frequently referred to as traitors or as members of the '5th column'¹⁵⁷, a term itself dating back to the Spanish Civil War. It appears as if the necessary appearance of stability can only be retained "by blaming someone else, even a previously friendly out-group" (Stavrakakis, 2008: 195), the former 'brother-nation' of Ukraine as one case in point. The reaction to Pussy Riot should here be interpreted as a moment when these tensions erupted, and as a symptom of their prior repression. As a matter of fact, the presence and role of certain myths encapsulating conflict capture the sense of an 'eternal return' of violence already referred to in the chapter I. It is now making a transfer from language to deed, as if in illustration of the powers of discourse:

This resolution of the traumas of Russian collective consciousness [...] has led not to a "healing" of [Russian] society but to a surge of relief following the break with Europe, a sense of liberation from repressive demands to be moral, to follow legal norms, to "behave" in a "civilized society" (Gudkov, *ibid.*).

Commentators have been keen to read the Russian present in terms of a return to previous models and temporalities, be it at times rather starkly as an attempt to "return Russia to the Middle Ages"¹⁵⁸. Analyses of contemporary 'transitional' or 'post-transitional' societies frequently operate in the register of temporality – indeed, their very denomination suggests the lens through which one is encouraged to view them. However, not only does it make for a limited perspective, in some occasions it also offers the temptation to harvest current events for their potential to engage in historical parallels. With this in mind, Gleb Napreenko insists that the recent past does not represent a simple 'return to the USSR':

¹⁵⁷ <http://slon.ru/insights/1190639/>

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2021499>

[...] to uncritically repeat the myths of Russian totalitarianism's eternal return does nothing but distort the situation, blocking all ways out of our common predicament.¹⁵⁹

In fact, the nature of periods of *latency* (Gumbrecht, 2012) as the current one is that they may come to rather unexpected ends. In the very case of the Soviet Union, it has been observed that its collapse came as a surprise to almost everyone. The state edifice had become so ossified that even those working hardest to erode it from within – the dissidents – were surprised by its seemingly sudden demise, as were international scholars (e.g. Cox, 2009). In the words of Alexey Yurchak, it appeared that “everything was forever until it was no more” (Yurchak, 2005). The experience of the ‘sudden’ collapse of the Soviet Union may thus be illustrative of how one’s gaze is necessarily reliant on surface phenomena, while subterranean forces continue their work, that is “the underground disintegration of the spiritual substance of a community which precedes and prepares the way for its spectacular public collapse” (Žižek, 1993: 285). In a separate publication, Gudkov, too, insists that this artificially created sense of collectivity cannot last forever¹⁶⁰.

Reflections on research design

Two factors facilitated a sense of being embedded in the life world (*Lebenswelt*) of the participants and discourses which formed the subject of the thesis, without being embedded (at the time of research) in their life conditions (*Lebenslage*). The first is the historically transnational consciousness of the Russian intelligentsia, which meant that even though the interview portion of the study took place in London, this is in no way at odds with the life trajectories of this group in Russia. In fact, the geographical distance may have been enabling of a novel kind of engagement with Russianness. The second factor is the increasing possibility of conducting research online (Chapter V), as well as the possibility of studying reactions to events through online discussions and forums, such as in the case of Pussy Riot’s performance and subsequent arrest. However, along with providing new types of material to investigate, the Internet as a medium also creates or enables certain types of reaction – the notorious degree of vitriol imbuing frequently anonymous online discussions is just one such example. It is yet to be determined how this specific, and relatively new medium affects users, in terms of the forms of expression which it allows, but also the affective registers it may tap into, or even create.

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/back-in-the-ussr/>

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.snob.ru/profile/10069/blog/79594>

These medium-specific effects have therefore been disregarded for the most part, although they are alluded to in Chapters III and V. Furthermore, while keeping to few questions, the survey component (see appendix F) did not always produce the kind of narratives it sought to elicit. I had previously conducted an open-ended survey as part of a research project on memory practises in the former German Democratic Republic, and, while it yielded many interesting responses, these too, varied greatly in length. However, the advantage of interviews in giving the interviewer the chance to delve deeper or ask for clarification, was seen not to outweigh the survey's ability to function as a kind of projection screen for these 'discourse rich' respondents (Halliday, 2004).

Further directions for research

Masculinity and femininity

Being concerned with moments in which identification with the nation becomes observable in discourse, questions that centre on ideas of masculinity and femininity have only been alluded to at their most salient, specifically in chapters VI and VII. However, this is not to ignore the fact that images of the nation are always gendered (Mosse, 1985), as manifest in the different connotations of 'fatherland' and 'motherland'- *отечество* and *родина* in the case of Russia. Different configurations of masculine and feminine ideals appear in instantiations of the leader as personified by Vladimir Putin, and in the punk femininity of members of Pussy Riot.

Future research more explicitly focused on these aspects could investigate how Putin's hypermasculinity has historic roots in Russian discourses of the nation. More psychoanalytically focused work could also shed light on his embodiment as the nation's 'father' who roots subjects in the sociopolitical, that is, symbolic order through processes of identification (Radstone, 2007; Treacher, 2013). As a leader he embodies both paternal and maternal characteristics, that is, his 'pure masculinity' is tempered by moments of tenderness towards animals and children. Indeed, the paternal aspect of his leadership is given additional poignancy by the fact that this youngest generation of voters in Russia is barely able to recall and hence imagine a political horizon that did not feature Putin at its zenith. It has even been referred to as 'Generation P'¹⁶¹. Potentially, such research could

¹⁶¹ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/alexandr-litoy/for-generation-p-putin-is-russia-cult-of-personality-youth-russia>

highlight not only the performative dimension of leadership, but also that, even if gender binaries have hardly been transcended, Putin as a leader needs to mediate between them so as to extend his appeal as widely as possible. Some of the representational mechanisms recruited to do so have been analysed in chapter VII, albeit with a somewhat different focal point.

Chapter VI indicated the link between the outrage following the performance and arrest of Pussy Riot, and a desire to police both their femininity and sexuality. While the degree to which they are representative of the Russian feminist movement is disputed, further analysis could place the group in the context of the feminist movement in the post-soviet world¹⁶². One obvious point of comparison hereby is Ukraine-based *FEMEN*, a group of feminist activists whose tactics – usually involving the display of naked bodies – and politics have attracted a fair degree of criticism over the years¹⁶³. Another worthwhile line of discourse analysis is the ways in which Pussy Riot's political project is being diminished through strategies of personalisation. This applies to both supporters and opponents, in that one side insists on connecting their achievements to their physical appearance (e.g. *Der Spiegel*, 33/2012, cited in chapter VI), while the other speculates whether it was 'broken hearts' or even 'mental deficiency' that turned them into feminists¹⁶⁴.

One existing body of work which engages directly with Pussy Riot in terms of their femininity is a public discussion by Irina Sandomirskaja and colleagues on the treatment the case has had in Russia, which locates the group's performance and reception within the history of the Russian and Soviet feminist movement¹⁶⁵. Unlike my own analysis in chapter VI, their debate places greater emphasis on the women's feminist agenda and how "the deepest collective anxiety that surfaced in the discussion, was the fear of the active and politically conscious woman, a woman who does not hesitate to use violence in claiming her subjectivity from the authority of the church, the family, the establishment, or the state" (Gradsкая et al, *ibid.*). Their analysis, despite its different

The 'P' here clearly stands for Putin, though it is also meant to evoke Victor Pelevin's eponymous novel published in 1999.

¹⁶² For example in ways similar to Lynne Segal's recent overview of feminist critiques of the state in relation to citizenship (Segal, 2012).

¹⁶³ <http://www.newstatesman.com/bim-adewunmi/2013/04/inconsistency-femens-imperialist-one-size-fits-all-attitude>

¹⁶⁴ <http://sobesednik.ru/incident/20120831-tainy-biografii-uchastnits-pussy-riot>

¹⁶⁵ <http://balticworlds.com/reflections-on-receptions/>

focal point, comes to similar conclusions about the societal tensions the case revealed:

In Pussy Riot's actions, the repressed social erupted like a volcano. It was a great shock for the enlightened public [...] to hear their own program screamed out — in shrill voices, in a “holy place”, accompanied by bad guitar playing and indecent gestures and formulated in a cascade of deeply abusing profane language – by higher-educated “girls” (*devushki*), defying their origin in “good families” and the assumptions concerning the propriety of a woman's artistic inclinations. This breach of the “clean” public's expectations became a veritable class-and-gender trouble for the progressives.

Indeed, in further agreement with the conclusions of chapter VI, the split they refer to is diagnosed as going through the very heart of the Russian liberal, educated elite, in that some felt unable to partake in the transgressive type of enjoyment offered in the women's performance.

Cinematic imagination and fantasy

Earlier in this chapter, the prevalence and significance of image-rich signifiers was described and explained in detail. While interviews and surveys featured a general tendency to mythologise certain aspects of Russian history, respondents used film scenes as a kind of imaginary supplement to an otherwise fractured representation of the past, both as an illustration of what the past ‘felt like’, or as a narrative device that ‘explained’ certain historical events or sequences¹⁶⁶. Additional research could therefore investigate whether cinematic images help identify particularly modes of identification with the nation via fantasmatic processes.

De Lauretis appears to have a similar question in mind when she states that “today cinema's unique effectivity in the production of a social imaginary (public fantasies) is

¹⁶⁶Some interview excerpts that illustrate this argument:

Katia: [...] *actually, there were lots of...my present image of life in this, er, Soviet Union, was shaped by different films [...]*...

*

Masha: *Ab...suddenly there was this...i don't know...there was a lot of Mafia things, and I don't know, it just ticked in my mind, a lot of these kinds of guys in leather jackets hanging around, a lot of these stupid films, like, really rubbish film (interviewer laughs), horrible, horrible films.*

*

Natasha (referencing the film *Tsar*): *It explains Russian mentality nowadays.*

understood to work through the fantasmatic production it elicits and shapes in individual spectators (private fantasies)” (Lauretis, 2008: 16). Her explanation is that:

[...] one might say that fantasy is the psychic mechanism that governs the translation of social representations into subjectivity and self-representation by a sort of adaptation or reworking of the social imaginary, or public fantasies, into individual, or private, fantasies. In turn, the latter may provide the imaginary scenarios by which events of the world are given dramatic or narrative coherence. (Lauretis, 2008: 17)

Therefore the key to approaching an answer to the abovementioned question may lie in a re-evaluation of Freud’s writing on conscious fantasies (see Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973) together with later insights into both psychoanalytically inflected film theory (such as Metz’ *Imaginary Signifier*) and a Žižekian approach to fantasy and ideology (Žižek, 1997). As Judith Butler has demonstrated in *The Force of Fantasy* (2000), even pornographic imagery, which is seemingly straightforward in its constellation and available points of entry into the scene, in fact offers multiple axes of identification, creating another explicit link between image and fantasy: “Fantasy, however, is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy, the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up in himself in the sequence of images.” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968: 17). Further research into the fate of cinematic objects in the formation of subjectivity could also help clarify the distinction between identification and incorporation laid out in chapter II, whereby the former represents a “modification of the self-representation” (Sandler, 1989: 11), while the latter leads to “the setting up of unconscious, internal “phantom” companions, felt to be a part of one’s inner world, yet external to one’s self-representation” (ibid.).

One attempt at explaining how myths as reflections of ideology make their way into subjects’ fantasies is offered by Bert Olivier (2000). He relates the impact and intensity of media images to accounts of the unconscious primary process as described by Freud, which “discourages individuals from engaging in the secondary process” (Olivier, 2000: 170), that is, from making the move from thing- to word-presentations. Olivier locates the impact cinematic images have on the viewer in the context of postmodernity, which is characterised by a flood of images so all-encompassing that Baudrillard has argued that the social universe has been eroded and replaced by ‘hyperreality’, which ‘encourages social actors to make no fundamental distinction between ‘concrete’ reality and the

'hyperreality' of images, a mode of gratification termed 'hallucinatory' by Freud" (Olivier, 2000: 167).

Lauren Berlant argues that the social researcher can even turn to cinematic images to capture the attrition of certain forms of social fantasy, as "cinema and other forms not only archive what is being lost but track what happens in the time that we inhabit before this is necessarily reflected in the 'sovereign fantasies' that govern life" (Berlant, 2011:7). By insisting that "certain times produce specific genres and tropes" (Berlant, *ibid.*) and thereby stressing the primacy of form over content, the question becomes not what is being conveyed in terms of story, but how particular genre tropes come to represent or anticipate changes to 'sovereign fantasies' that structure subjects' reality.

Indeed, as will have become apparent from this final section, the fundamental aspects outlined for the study of the incorporation of cinematic imagery are also those that featured prominently in this thesis, as it tracked the patterns and prevalent formations of Russian subjectivities and identifications across several instantiations of discourse. In the discursive conditions of an absence of new symbolic forms, coupled with the power of certain archaic signifiers to draw individuals back into the past, some of these myths were allowed to proliferate. This situation was in turn exploited by the government. A further direction for future research could therefore apply one of this thesis' distinctive contributions highlighting the role of myths and images as vehicles of national fantasy to a psychosocial study of their interaction with hyperrealism, which marks much of contemporary life, leading to a blurring of boundaries between the factual and the fictional.

The bleeding of one realm into another has reached a kind of apogee in contemporary Russia, whose government "does not appeal to any of the dimensions of truth, neither its universality nor its subjective intimacy. Instead, it operates in the horizonless register of *illusions*" (Napreenko, 2014). However, rather than a complete absence of symbolic functions unable to provide the post-Soviet subjects with identificatory positions, as was claimed in some of the literature, this thesis has found that such a lack of subjective formations is always relative rather than absolute. It is filled by the diverse modes of identification and disidentification detailed in this study. They allow a movement in and out of belonging, whether through upholding an imagined and imaginary past as idyll,

through finding temporary solidarity in suffering as in the case of Pussy Riot, or in moments of collective euphoria in mass events. Indeed, Vladimir Putin relies on an unstable amalgam of these symbols and instances to build his persona, which is supplemented with violence when this fails to elicit the desired effect. As this thesis demonstrated, when so much of the symbolic realm of contemporary Russia is given over to either a recycling and celebration of the past, or a mourning of the losses associated with its passing, attachments to Russianness will invariably be characterised by ambiguity and tension.

References

- Adorno, T. W. (1951/2001). *The culture industry: Selected essays on mass culture*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Psychology Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Akhtar, S. (1999). *Immigration and Identity: Turmoil, Treatment, and Transformation*, Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc.
- Admiraal, B. (2009). A Religion for the Nation or a Nation for the Religion? Putin's Third Way for Russia. In M. Laruelle (Ed.), *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Alcorn, Marshall W. (2002) *Changing the subject in English class: Discourse and the constructions of desire*. Carbondale: SIU Press.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London ; New York: Verso.
- Appadurai, A. (1993). Patriotism and its Futures. *Public Culture*, 5, 411-429.
- Arel, D., & Ruble, B. A. (2006). Rebounding identities : the politics of identity in Russia and Ukraine. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Baer, Brian J. (2013). Post-Soviet self-fashioning and the politics of representation. In: Goscilo, H. (Ed.) *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Beck, U. & Beck Gernsheim, E. (2001). *Individualization*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U. (2002). The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19, 17-44.
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel optimism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Beumers, B. (2008). Killers and Gangsters: The Heroes of Russian Blockbusters of the Putin Era. In S. White (Ed.), *Media, Culture and Society in Putin's Russia*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2004) Interrogating identity: Franz Fanon & the postcolonial prerogative. In: *The location of culture*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- Bhaskar, R. (1989). *Reclaiming reality : a critical introduction to contemporary philosophy*. London: Verso Paper.
- Blumer, H. (1986). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Univ of California Press.
- Billig, M. (1978). *Fascists: A social psychological view of the national front*. London: Academic Press.
- Billig, M. (1988). *Ideological dilemmas : a social psychology of everyday thinking*. London: Sage.
- Billig, M. (1997). The Dialogic Unconscious: Psychoanalysis, Discursive Psychology and the Nature of Repression. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 36, 139-159.
- Billig, M. (1999). *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Billig, M. (2006). A psychoanalytic discursive psychology: From consciousness to unconsciousness. *Discourse Studies*, 8(1), 17-24.
- Bloom, M. (2009). Existence is Song: The Dream-like Aesthetics of Duration in *Mirror*. *Offscreen* 13:7.
- Borch-Jacobsen, M. (1994). The Oedipus Problem in Freud and Lacan. *Critical Inquiry* 20: 267–82
- Borenstein, E. (2007). *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Born, G. (1998). Anthropology, Kleinian psychoanalysis, and the subject in culture. *American Anthropologist*, 100(2), 373-386.
- Botz-Bornstein, T. (2007). *Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Bergman, Sokurov, Kubrick, and Wong Kar-Wai*. New York, NY: Lexington Books.
- Boym, S. (1994). *Common places : mythologies of everyday life in Russia*. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press.
- Boym, S. (1995). From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia. *Representations*, 49, 133–166.
- Boym, S. (2001). *The future of nostalgia*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bracher, M., Alcorn, M. W., Corthell, R. J., & Massardier-Kennedy, F. (Eds.). (1997). *Lacanian theory of discourse: Subject, structure, and society*. New York: NYU Press.

- Brah, A. (1992) 'Difference, diversity and differentiation', in J. Donald and A. Rattansi (eds), *Race, Culture and Difference*, London: Sage (126-45).
- Branney, P. (2008). Subjectivity, Not Personality: Combining Discourse Analysis and Psychoanalysis. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(2), 574-590.
- Brock, M., Truscott, R. (2012) "What's the Difference Between a Melancholic Apartheid Moustache and a Nostalgic GDR Telephone?" *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 18: 3, pp.318-328.
- Budraitskis, I. (2014). The Weakest Link of Managed Democracy: How the Parliament Gave Birth to Nonparliamentary Politics. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 113(1), 169–185.
- Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble and the subversion of identity*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: theories in subjection*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Butler, J. (2000), *The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess* in: Drucilla Cornell (Editor). *Feminism and Pornography*. Oxford Readings in Feminism. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. Fordham Univ Press.
- Butler, R. (2005). *Slavoj Žižek: live theory*. New York: Continuum.
- Carnaghan, E. (1996). Alienation, Apathy, or Ambivalence? "Don't Knows" and Democracy in Russia. *Slavic Review*, 55(2), 325-363.
- Cassiday, J. & Johnson, E. (2013) A Personality Cult for the Postmodern Age: Reading Vladimir Putin's Public Persona, in Goscilo, H. (ed.). *Putin as celebrity and cultural icon*. Abingdon, Oxon
- Castoriadis, C. (2004). *The Rising Tide of Insignificance*. (Translated from the French and edited anonymously, available online <http://www.notbored.org/RTI.html>, Last accessed 14.11.2014).
- Chehonadskih, M. (2012). What is Pussy Riot's 'Idea'? *Radical Philosophy*, 176.

- Chehonadskih, M. (2014). 'The Class Composition of Russia's Anti-Putin Movement. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 113(1), 196–209.
- Clark, K. (1981) *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Condee, N. (2006). Drowning or waving? Some remarks on Russian cultural studies. *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 197-203.
- Condee, N. (2008). " Borat": Putting the Id Back in Identity Politics. *Slavic Review*, 84-87.
- Cox, M. (2009) Why did we get the end of the Cold War wrong? *British journal of politics and international relations*, 11 (2). pp. 161-176.
- Daly, G. (1999). Ideology and its paradoxes: Dimensions of fantasy and enjoyment. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 4(2), 219 - 238.
- De Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (1999). The discursive construction of national identities. *Discourse & Society*, 10(2), 149-173.
- Dolar, M. (1993). Beyond Interpellation. *Qui Parle*, 6: 2, pp. 75-96.
- Donald, J., & Rattansi, A. (1992). "Race", culture, and difference. London; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications in association with the Open University.
- Easthope, A. (1998). *Englishness and National Culture*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Eco, U. (1986). *Travels In Hyperreality*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Edley, N. (2001). Analysing Masculinity: Interpretative Repertoires, Ideological Dilemmas and Subject Positions. In S. Yates, M. Wetherell & S. Taylor (Eds.), *Discourse as Data: a guide for analysis*. London: Sage.
- Engelstein, L. (2008). Culture, culture everywhere: interpretations of modern Russia, across the 1991 divide. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2(2), 363-393.
- Eremicheva, G. V. (2010). Religious Searching and New Religious Organizations: On the Example of the Church of Christ in St. Petersburg. In M. M. Balzer (Ed.), *Religion and Politics in Russia: A reader*. New York: M.E. Sharpe
- Etkind, A.. (2011). *Internal colonization : Russia's imperial experience*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Evans, D. (1996). *An introductory dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis*. London ; New York: Routledge.

- Figlio, K. (2003) Getting to the beginning: identification and concrete thinking in historical consciousness. In: Hodgkin, K., Radstone, S. (eds.). (2003). *Regimes of Memory*. London: Routledge.
- Figes, O. (2003). *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*. London: Penguin.
- Fink, B. (1996). *The Lacanian Subject: between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fitzpatrick, S. (2005). *Tear off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press,
- Foucault, M. (2002). The Subject and Power. In J. Faubion (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Power - Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Vol. 3). London: Penguin Books.
- Freud, S. (1917, 1957) *Mourning and melancholia*. Standard Edition, 14. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 243–258.
- Freud, S., & Strachey, J. (1955). The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud / Vol. 18, (1920-1922) : *Beyond the pleasure principle ; Group psychology, and other works*. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Freud, S. (1921, 1955) *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego*. Standard Edition, 18. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 69–143.
- Freud, S. (1923, 1961) *The ego and the id*. Standard Edition, 19. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 12–66.
- Freud, S. (1930, 2004). *Civilization and its discontents*. London: Penguin.
- Frosh, S. (2002). Enjoyment, bigotry, discourse and cognition. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 41, 189-193.
- Frosh, S., Phoenix, A., & Pattman, R. (2003). Taking a Stand: Using psychoanalysis to explore the positioning of subjects in discourse. *British Journal of Social Psychology* (42), 39-53.
- Frosh, S. (2007). Disintegrating Qualitative Research. *Theory & Psychology*, 17(5), 635–653.
- Frosh, S., & Baraitser, L. (2008). Psychoanalysis and Psychosocial Studies. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 13(4), 346-365.
- Frosh, S. (2010). *Psychoanalysis outside the clinic: Interventions in psychosocial studies*. Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Frosh, S. (2013). *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions*. Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Frueh, D. (2000). Online-Forschung im Zeichen des Qualitativen Paradigmas. Methodologische Reflexion und empirische Erfahrungen. *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 1: 3, art. 35.
- Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The end of history and the last man*. New York: Free Press ; Toronto.
- Fuss, D. (1994). Interior colonies: Frantz Fanon and the politics of identification. *diacritics*, 20-42.
- Gergen, K. J. (1999). Social Construction and the Transformation of Identity Politics. In F. Newman & L. Holzman (Eds.), *End of knowing: A new developmental way of learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Gessen, M. (1997). *Dead again: The Russian intelligentsia after communism*. London: Verso.
- Gessen, M. (2012). *The man without a face: the unlikely rise of Vladimir Putin*. London: Granta Books.
- Gilroy, P. (2005). *Postcolonial melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Glynos, J. (2001). The grip of ideology: A Lacanian approach to the theory of ideology. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 6(2), 191-214.
- Glynos, J., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2003). Encounters of the Real Kind: Sussing Out the Limits of Laclau's Embrace of Lacan. *Journal for Lacanian Studies*, 1(1), 129-148.
- Glynos, J. (2008). Ideological Fantasy at Work. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(3), 275-296.
- Glynos, J., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2010). Politics and the unconscious - An interview with Ernesto Laclau. *Subjectivity*, 3(3), 231-244.
- Gogol, N. (1842/2004). *Dead souls*. London: Penguin.
- Goscilo, H. (2013). *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Gumbrecht, H. U. (2012). *Nach 1945: Latenz als Ursprung der Gegenwart*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Gusejnov, G. (2012). Кондурация, или как понимать дело Pussy Riot. *Logos*, 1(85), pp. 4-13.

- Habermas, J. (1990). What does socialism mean today? The rectifying revolution and the need for new thinking on the left. *New Left Review*, 183(1995), 109-131.
- Hall, S. (1988). Minimal Selves. In I. o. C. Arts. (Ed.), *Identity: The Real Me*. London: ICA Documents.
- Hall, S. (1996). *Modernity : an introduction to modern societies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Halliday, R. (2004) 'Reflecting the self', in Caroline Knowles and Paul Sweetman (eds), *Picturing the Social Landscape*, London: Routledge.
- Henriques, J., Hollway, W., Urwin, C., Venn, C., & Walkerdine, V. (1984). *Changing the subject: psychology, social regulation and subjectivity*. London: Methuen.
- Hill, F., & Gaddy, C. G. (2013). *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Hodgson, K. ; Smith, A. (in press) *The Twentieth-Century Russian Poetry Canon and Post-Soviet National Identity*, Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Hollway, W. (1989). *Subjectivity and method in psychology : gender, meaning and science*. London: Sage.
- Hook, D. (2005). Affecting whiteness: Racism as technology of affect. *Critical Psychology* (16), 74-99.
- Hook, D. (2008a). Absolute Other: Lacan's 'Big Other' as adjunct to critical social psychological analysis. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(1), 51-73.
- Hook, D. (2008b). Fantasmatic Transactions: On the Persistence of Apartheid Ideology. *Subjectivity*, 24, 275-297.
- Hook, D. (2008c). Perspectives on 'Lacanian subjectivities'. *Subjectivity*, 24, 247-255.
- Hook, D., Franks, B. and Bauer, M. (Eds). (2011a) *The social psychology of communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Hook, D. (2011b). *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- Hook, D. (2013). *(Post)apartheid Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation (Studies in the Psychosocial)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Hook, D. (2014). Five moments in the post apartheid unconscious. Unpublished paper. Birkbeck College, University of London.
- Hook, D. (2014). Love, artificiality and mass identification. *Psychodynamic Practice*, 20(2), 128-143.
- Howarth, D. R., Norval, A., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2000). *Discourse theory and political analysis : identities, hegemonies, and social change*. New York: Manchester University.
- Khanna, R. (2003). *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.
- Kharkhordin, O. (1999). *The collective and the individual in Russia : a study of practices*. Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press.
- Knowles, C., & Sweetman, P. (2004). *Picturing the social landscape: Visual methods and the sociological imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Lacan, J. (1954-55, 1988). *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Lacan, J. (1977). *Écrits : a selection* A. Sheridan, ed., London : Tavistock Publications.
- Laclau, E. (1990). *New reflections on the revolution of our time*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy : towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2004) 'Glimpsing the Future', in Critchley, S. and Marchart, O. (eds) *Laclau: A critical reader*, London: Routledge.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. London: Verso.
- Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J.-B. (1968). Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. vol. 49.
- Laplanche, J., Pontalis, J. B., & Nicholson-Smith, D. (1973). *The language of psycho-analysis*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Lapping, C. (2011). *Psychoanalysis in social research: shifting theories and reframing concepts*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- Laruelle, M. (2009). *Russian nationalism and the national reassertion of Russia*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- De Lauretis, T. (2008). *Freud's drive: Psychoanalysis, literature and film*. Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Layton, L. (2014). Some psychic effects of neoliberalism: Narcissism, disavowal, perversion. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 19(2), 161-178.
- Leader, D. (2003). Lacan's myths. *The Cambridge companion to Lacan* (edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leader, D. (2011). *What is Madness?* London: Penguin.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1987). *Anthropology and myth: lectures 1951-1982*. Oxford : Basil Blackwell.
- Lewis, G. (2010). Animating hatreds: research encounters, organisational secrets, emotional truths', in *Secrecy and Silence in the research process*, ed. By Roisin Ryan-Flood and Ros Gill, London: Routledge, pp.211-227.
- List, E. (2009). *Psychoanalyse: Geschichte, Theorie, Anwendungen*. Wien: UTB Verlag.
- Leonova, A. (2009). Electoral Choice, Cultural Capital, and Xenophobic Attitudes in Russia (1994-2006). In M. Laruelle (Ed.), *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*, London: Routledge.
- Luckhurst, J. (2008). *A Constructivist Approach to Identity and how to Combine Different Levels of Analysis*. Paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention.
- Malone, K. R. (2000). Subjectivity and the Address to the Other A Lacanian View of Some Impasses in Theory and Psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, 10(1), 79–86.
- Mann, C.(2000). *Internet communication and qualitative research : a handbook for researching online* F. Stewart, ed., London : Sage.
- Mannoni, O. (2003). I Know Well but All the Same. *Perversion and the social relation*, 68-92.
- Markova, I. (2004). *Trust and Democratic Transition in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford ; New York: OUP/British Academy.
- Matveev, I. (2014). The “Two Russias” Culture War: Constructions of the “People” during the 2011-2013 Protests. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 113(1), 186–195.
- Mead, G. H., Morris, C. W., & Morris, C. W. (1934). *Mind, self, and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press.

Metz, C. (1982). *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mikhailova, T. (2013). Putin as the Father of the Nation: His Family and Other Animals. *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Mitscherlich, A. and Mitscherlich, M. (1975) *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour*. Translated by B.R. Placzek. New York: Grove Press.

Mosse, G. L. (1985) *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Muñoz, J. E. (1999) Performing Disidentity: disidentification as a practice of freedom. In: *Disidentifications: queers of color and the performance of politics*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Nadkarni, M., Shvechenko, O. (2004) "The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist Practices." *Ab Imperio*, 2, pp. 487-519.

Neill, C. (2013). Breaking the text: An introduction to Lacanian discourse analysis. *Theory & Psychology*, 23, pp.1-17.

Nikelly, A.G. (2004) The Anatomy of Nostalgia: From Pathology to Normality. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 1(2), pp.182-199.

Nowakowski, A.L (2012). *Rewriting the Future: The Construction of Masculine Subjectivity within Articulations of Russia's Post-Soviet National Idea*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Denver.

Olivier, B. (2000). Freud and the question of mediated social behaviour. *Society in transition*, 31(2), 163-174.

Oushakine, S. (2000). In the State of Post-Soviet Aphasia: Symbolic Development in Contemporary Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52 (6), pp. 991-1016.

Oushakine, S.A. (2007) 'We're Nostalgic But We're Not Crazy': Retrofitting the Past in Russia. *The Russian Review*, 66, p. 451 - 482.

Palmade, J. (ed.) (2003). *L'incertitude Comme Norme: Identités Et Parcours Professionnels*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Parker, I. (1997a). *Psychoanalytic culture: psychoanalytic discourse in western society*. London: Sage.

- Parker, I. (1997b). Discursive Psychology. In D. Fox & I. Prilleltensky (Eds.), *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*. London: Sage.
- Parker, I. (2005). *Qualitative Psychology: Introducing Radical Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Parker, I. (2007). Identification, Signifiers, Negation and the Unary Trait in Seminar IX. *Journal for Lacanian Studies*, 5(1), 36-52.
- Parker, I., & Hook, D. (2008). Psychoanalysis and Social Psychology: Historical Connections and Contemporary Applications. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 18, 91-95.
- Parker, I. (2010). Psychosocial studies: Lacanian discourse analysis negotiating interview text. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 15(2), 156-172.
- Patico, J. (2005). To be happy in a Mercedes: tropes of value and ambivalent visions of marketization. *American Ethnologist*, 32(3), 479-405.
- Pavón Cuéllar, D. (2010). *From the conscious interior to an exterior unconscious : Lacan, discourse analysis, and social psychology*. London: Karnac Books.
- Pavón-Cuéllar, D. (2014). Extimacy, in Thomas Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. New York: Springer.
- Penzin, A. (2014). Tumult in the Land of Managed Democracy: An Introduction. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 113(1), 162-168.
- Potter, J., Wetherell, M., Gill, R., & Edwards, D. (1990). Discourse: noun, verb or social practice?. *Philosophical Psychology*, 3(2-3), 205-217.
- Prozorov, S. (2005). Russian conservatism in the Putin presidency: The dispersion of a hegemonic discourse. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 10(2), 121-143.
- Prozorov, S. (2009). *The ethics of postcommunism : history and social praxis in Russia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rabaté, J.-M. (2003). *The Cambridge companion to Lacan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Radstone, S. (2007). *The sexual politics of time : confession, nostalgia, memory*. London: Routledge.

- Ray, L. (1997). Post-Communism: Postmodernity or modernity revisited?. *British Journal of Sociology*, 543-560.
- Rose, J. (1987). Femininity and its discontents. *Feminist Review* (ed.) *Sexuality: A Reader*, London: Virago.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge university press.
- Rose, N. S. (1999). *Governing the soul: the shaping of the private self*. London; New York: Free Association Books.
- Said, E. W. (1978/1995). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin.
- Sakwa, R. (2007). *Putin: Russia's choice*. London: Routledge.
- Sandler, J. ed. (1988) *Projection, Identification, Projective Identification*, London: Karnac Books.
- Sandomirskaja, I. (1995). Old Wives' Tales: Notes on the Rhetoric of the Post-Sovjet Intelligentsia. *Slavica Lundensia*, 14.
- Sandomirskaja, I. (1999). Writing on the Wall: Remont, restoration and identity. *Slavica Lundensia*, 19.
- Sandomirskaja, I. (2001). *Книга о родине : Опыт анализа дискурсивных практик*. WIENER SLAWISTISCHER ALMANACH, Sonderband 50.
- Sandomirskaja, I. (2003). Der Heimatbegriff in der sowjetischen und postsowjetischen diskursiven Praxis., in: Kaser, K. (2003). *Wieser Enzyklopädie des europäischen Ostens: Europa und die Grenzen im Kopf* (Vol. 11). Wien: Wieser.
- Santner, E. L. (1996). *My own private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's secret history of modernity*. Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press.
- Scribner, C. (2003). *Requiem for Communism*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT.
- Segal, L (2012), 'Reluctant Citizens: Between Incorporation and Resistance', in *Beyond Citizenship? Feminism and the transformation of belonging*, ed. S. Roseneil, Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shnirelman, V. (2009). New Racism, 'Clash of Civilizations', and Russia. In M. Laruelle (Ed.), *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- Smith, K. E. (2002). *Mythmaking in the new Russia: politics and memory during the Yeltsin era*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Solovyov, V. and Klepikova, E. (1995) *Zhirinovskiy: The Paradoxes of Russian Fascism*, Viking: London.
- Stavrakakis, Y. (1999). *Lacan and the political*. London: Routledge.
- Stavrakakis, Y. (2008). *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, and Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sullivan, G. (2009). Germany, Television and the 2006 World Cup: National Narrative of Pride and Party Patriotism. In: Castelló, E., Dhoest, A., & O'Donnell, H. (2009). *The nation on screen: Discourses of the national on global television*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Sullivan, G. (2014). Collective pride, happiness and celebratory emotions: aggregate, network and cultural models. In M. Salmela & C. von Scheve (Eds.), *Collective Emotions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swedlow, W. C. (2011). *Against the Personification of Democracy*. London: Continuum.
- Tannock, S. (1995). Nostalgia Critique, *Cultural Studies*, 3: 461.
- Treacher Kabesh, A. (2013). *Postcolonial masculinities : emotions, histories and ethics*. Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT USA: Ashgate.
- Trubina, E. (2008) "Cultural Difference" in Russia's Industrial Cities: The Politics of Trade, Employment, and Emotions. Unpublished conference paper presented at American Association of Geographers in Boston, 15-20 April 2008.
- Urban, M. (1994). The Politics of Identity in Russia's Postcommunist Transition: The Nation against Itself. *Slavic Review*, 53(3), 733-765.
- Vanheule, S., & Verhaeghe, P. (2009). Identity through a psychoanalytic looking glass. *Theory & Psychology*, 19(3), 391-411.
- Vighi, F., & Feldner, H. (2010). From subject to politics: The Zizekian field today. *Subjectivity*, 3(1), 31-52.
- Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1988). Discourse analysis and the identification of interpretative repertoires. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *Analysing Everyday Explanation*. London: Sage.

- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse and Society*, 9, 387-412.
- Wilson, J. L. (2005). *Nostalgia: sanctuary of meaning*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971, 2005). *Playing and reality*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Taylor, S., Yates, S., & Open University. (2001). *Discourse theory and practice : a reader*. London: Sage.
- Wolfenstein, E.V. (1990). Group Phantasies and the Individual: A Critical Analysis of Psychoanalytic Group Psychology. *Free Associations*, 20.
- Yates, C. (2010). Spinning, spooning and the seductions of flirtatious masculinity in contemporary politics. *Subjectivity*, 3(3), 282-302.
- Young, L. S., & Frosh, S. (2010). And where were your brothers in all this?': A psychosocial approach to texts on 'brothering'. *Qualitative Research*, 10(5), 511-531.
- Yurchak, A. (1997). The cynical reason of late socialism: power, pretense, and the anecdote. *Public culture*, 9(2), 161-188.
- Yurchak, A. (2005). *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Žižek, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (1993). *Tarrying with the negative : Kant, Hegel, and the critique of ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Žižek, S. (1997). *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (1999), The thing from inner space on Tarkovsky, *Angelaki*, 4: 3.
- Žižek, S. (2002). *For they know not what they do: enjoyment as a political factor*. London; New York: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2003). *Ideology Reloaded*. In These Times. Retrieved from http://www.inthesetimes.org/article/80/ideology_reloaded/ Last accessed 14.11.2014.
- Žižek, S. (2006). *How to read Lacan*. London: Granta Books.
- Žižek, S. (2008). *In defense of lost causes*. London: Verso.

Online & newspaper resources

(Per chapter and in order of appearance)

Chapter I:

Rosenberg, D. 'The Wacky World of Eastern Europe in the Early 2000s', *Slate*, 30.03.2014, Last accessed 30.08.2014.
http://www.slate.com/blogs/behold/2014/03/30/martin_kollar_nothing_special_examines_the_often_bizarre_world_of_eastern.html

Cucci, J. '42 GIFS that prove Russia is the most bizarre place on earth', *The Roosevelts*, 18.10.2013. Last accessed 16.10.2014. <http://www.rsvlts.com/2013/10/18/meanwhile-in-russia-all-gif-edition/#1>

Condee, N. 'Next Page: Learnings of Borat for make benefit cultural studies', Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 12.11.2006. Last accessed 23.09.2014. <http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2006/11/12/Next-Page-Learnings-of-Borat-for-make-benefit-cultural-studies/stories/200611120163>

Rann, J. 'Beauty and the east: allure and exploitation in post-Soviet ruin photography', *The Calvert Journal*, July 2014, last accessed 30.08.2014.
<http://calvertjournal.com/features/show/2950/russian-ruins-photography#.U9qWmRa0Zg2>

Starobin, P. 'Russia's Father Problem', *The Boston Globe*, 08.01.2012, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/01/08/russia-father-problem/tl6p5zMMq7OxLdqFptAnUN/story.html>

De Waal, T. 'How Gogol Explains the Post-Soviet World', *Foreign Policy*, 27.02.2012, Last accessed 30.08.2014.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/27/how_gogol_explains_the_post_soviet_world_and_chekhov_and_dostoyevsky?page=full

Khapaeva, D. 'History without memory: Gothic morality in post-Soviet society', *Eurozine*, 02.02.2009. Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-02-02-khapaeva-en.html>

Putzier, K. 'Putin, The Man Who Would Be Tsar', *World Policy*, 05.08.2013. Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/08/05/putin-man-who-would-be-tsar>

Baunov, A. 'A different Putin and his new regime', *slon.ru*, 24.09.2013, Last accessed 30.08.2014. http://slon.ru/world/novyy_rezhim-994537.xhtml

- Sokolov, S. "Журналисты сами продали свободу слова" (*interview with BBC Russia*). 10.11.2010, last accessed 30.08.2014.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2010/11/101110_novaya_sokolov_interview.shtml
- Andreeva, O. 'We are Russians (Русские Мы)', *Russkii Reporter*, 29.02.2012, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://rusrep.ru/article/2012/02/29/russians/>
- Bershidskii, L. 'Why Putin and Gessen did not understand each other'. *Snob.ru*, 13.09.2012, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.snob.ru/selected/entry/52681>
- Zubarevich, N. 'Four Russias', *Vedomosti.ru*, 30.12.2011, Last accessed 30.08.2014. http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1467059/chetyre_rossii
- Pomerantsev, P. 'Putin's Rasputin', *London Review of Books*, 20.10. 2011, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n20/peter-pomerantsev/putins-rasputin>
- Gudkov, L. 'Russian cynicism: symptom of a stagnant society', *openDemocracy*, 22.10.2013, Last accessed 05.09.2014. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/lev-gudkov/russian-cynicism-symptom-of-stagnant-society>
- Russia Votes: President's performance in office – Trends, *Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde* (using data from the Levada Centre, Moscow), last updated 30.09.2014, Last accessed 16.10.2014.
http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency_performance_trends.php
- Russia – GDP – per capita (PPP) (US\$), *index mundi* (using data from CIA World Factbook), 01.01.2011, Last accessed 16.10.2014.
<http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=rs&v=67>
- Russia: Freedom of the Press 2014 (report), *Freedom House*. Last accessed 16.10.2014.
<http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/russia#.VDPJQVZIUak>
- Stengel, R. 'Choosing Order Before Freedom', *Time*, 19.12.2007, Last accessed 16.10.2014.
http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1690757_1696150,00.html
- Anderson, K. 'The Protester', *Time*, 14.12.2011, Last accessed 16.10.2014.
http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132,00.html
- Limonov, E. 'Pussy Riot's Mental Epidemia has Spread Outside of Russia', *limonov-eduard.livejournal.com*, 07.09.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://limonov-eduard.livejournal.com/246726.html>

Gorodetskaya, N. 'Persons with Russian citizenship', *Kommersant*, 26.08.2013, Last accessed 16.10.2014. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2263724>

Chapter IV:

Kashin, O. 'Don't Deny Russians Human Emotions', *kashin.ru*, 21.03.2014, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://kashin.guru/2014/05/21/polska/>

'Test Your Russianness', *Kommersant.ru*, Last accessed 30.08.2014.
<http://www.kommersant.ru/k-vlast/vlast-test.asp>

Chapter IV:

Troitsky, A., Pomerantsev, P., Carroll, O. 'Talking Point: is culture the new politics in Russia?', *openDemocracy*, 27.03.2013, Last accessed 31.08.2014.
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/artemy-troitsky-peter-pomerantsev-oliver-carroll/talking-point-is-culture-new-politics-in->

Chapter VI:

'Pussy Riot - Punk Prayer "Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away" (English subtitles)', *YouTube clip*, uploaded 17.08.2012, Last accessed 02.09.2014.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPDkJbTQRCY>

Gathmann, M. 'Lady Suppenhuhn', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* online, 25.08.2012, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/pussy-riot-lady-suppenhuhn-11867761.html>

Troitsky, A., Pomerantsev, P., Carroll, O. 'Talking Point: is culture the new politics in Russia?', *openDemocracy*, 27.03.2013, Last accessed 31.08.2014.
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/artemy-troitsky-peter-pomerantsev-oliver-carroll/talking-point-is-culture-new-politics-in->

Mendras, M. 'Back to no future', *openDemocracy*, 10.05. 2013, Last accessed 31.08.2014.
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/marie-mendras/back-to-no-future>

Sinel'nikov, M. 'Muslim Riot and Pussy Innocence, or 'Thank God not in the US'', *Pravda.ru*, 19.09.2012, Last Accessed 31.08.2014.
<http://www.pravda.ru/politics/parties/other/19-09-2012/1128474-0/>

Lukashevsky, S. 'How God came to vote for Putin: the background to Pussy Riot', *openDemocracy*, 27.08.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014.
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/sergei-lukashevsky/how-god-came-to-vote-for-putin-background-to-pussy-riot>

- Borusyak, L. 'After the Performance', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta online*, 05.10.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2012-10-05/5_reaction.html
- 'Putin considers Pussy Riot verdict just', *Komsomolskaya Pravda online*, 07.10.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://rostov.kp.ru/online/news/1265200/>
- Minkin, A. 'Global Bl-phemy: What to think?', *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 20.09.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2012/09/20/751288-mirovoe-bstvo.html>
- 'Survey: Pussy Riot trial interests less than half of all Russians', *rbc.ru*, 12. 09.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://top.rbc.ru/society/12/09/2012/669236.shtml>
- The Case of Pussy Riot: public response, *Public Opinion Foundation fom.ru*, 30.08.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10606> last accessed 16.05.2013
- 'Russians and the case of Pussy Riot', *Levada-Center*, 31.07.2012, Last accessed, 31.08.2014. <http://www.levada.ru/31-07-2012/rossiyane-o-dele-pussy-riot>
- Žižek, S. 'The True Blasphemy: Slavoj Žižek on Pussy Riot', *Dangerous Minds*, 08.10.2012, 31.08.2014. http://dangerousminds.net/comments/the_true_blasphemy_slavoj_zhizhek_on_pussy_riot
- Diez, G.; Mayr, W.; Schepp, M. 'Angst vor dem eigenen Volk', *Der Spiegel* 33/2012, 13.08.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-87737196.html>
- Limonov, E. 'Pussy Riot's Mental Epidemia has Spread Outside of Russia', *limonov-eduard.livejournal.com*, 07.09.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://limonov-eduard.livejournal.com/246726.html>
- 'Medvedev admits, that Pussy Riot case 'nauseates' him', *rosbalt.ru*, 12.09.2012, Last accessed 31.08.2014. <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2012/09/12/1033560.html>
- 'Biographical Secrets of Pussy Riot Members', *newsland.ru*, 31.08.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1026944/>
- 'Weekly survey: Do You Know How to Translate Pussy Riot's Name into Russian?', *Biznes Online business-gazeta.ru*, 13.10.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/68151/>
- '"Pussy Riot" Just Needs a Good Flogging?', *tv100.ru*, 19.09.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://www.tv100.ru/news/pussy-riot-nado-prosto-vyporot-62201/>

“The Workers of “Togliattiazot” Want to Re-educate the “Pussy Riot hooligans””, *Interfax* *interfax.ru*, 04.10.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014.
<http://www.interfax.ru/news.asp?id=269151>

Surganova, E. ‘Enraged Parishioner’, *lenta.ru*, 13.09.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014.
<http://lenta.ru/articles/2012/09/13/mamontov/>

Aleksandrov, O. ‘Morality crisis, or “The 21st Century Dulles Plan”’, *Moscow Post* *moscow-post.com*, 05.10.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014. http://moscow-post.ru/redactor/krizis_nravstvennosti_ili_plan_dallesa_xxi_veka10102/

Gubin, D. ‘Pussy Riot as a Professorship in the Academy of Arts’, 07.09.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://www.rosbalt.ru/blogs/2012/09/07/1031550.html>

Chapter VII:

Lipovetsky, M. ‘The indiscreet charm of the Russian cynic’, *openDemocracy*, 24.10.2013, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/mark-lipovetsky/indiscreet-charm-of-russian-cynic>

Davydov, I. ‘More Better’, *Russkii Zhurnal* *russ.ru*, 03.02.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014.
<http://russ.ru/pole/Bolee-luchshe>

Guillory, S. ‘Results from Putin’s Direct Line’, *Sean’s Russia Blog*, 27.05.2013, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://seansrussiablog.org/2013/05/27/results-from-the-direct-line/>

Lipman, M. ‘The Putin Toothpick’, *The New Yorker*, 08.03.2004, Last accessed 01.09.2014. http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/03/08/040308ta_talk_lipman

Starobin, P. ‘Russia’s Father Problem’, *The Boston Globe*, 08.01.2012, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/01/08/russia-father-problem/tl6p5zMMq7OxLdqFptAnUN/story.html>

Adomanis, M. ‘Vladimir Putin’s Approval Rating Has Been Holding Steady For Almost Two Years’, *Forbes*, 13.01.2014, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2014/01/13/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-has-been-holding-steady-for-almost-two-years/>

Holmes, S.; Krastev, I. ‘The sense of an ending’, *Eurozine*, 17.02.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2012-02-17-krastev-en.html>

- Baczynska, G. 'Putin Catches Giant Fish, Russians Not Amused', *The Huffington Post*, 29.07.2013, Last accessed 01.09.2014.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/29/putin-catches-giant-fish_n_3669547.html
- 'Vladimir Putin Paid Farewell to his First Judo Coach', *Kommersant*, 09.08.2013, Last accessed 01.09.2014. <http://www.kommersant.ru/news/2251781>
- 'L'erotismo di Vladimir Putin', *Il Post*, 27.02.2012, Last accessed 01.09.2014.
<http://www.ilpost.it/2012/02/27/lerotismo-di-vladimir-putin/>
- Hyde, M. 'Relax, whales: Kim Basinger has your back', *The Guardian online*, 22.08.2013, Last Accessed 02.09.2014.
<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/lostinshowbiz/2013/aug/22/whales-kim-basinger-peta-vladimir-putin>
- 'For her first time, beautiful girl has her fortune told', *YouTube clip*, uploaded 20.02.2012, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Noo0lzJILaM#t=12>
- 'Happy Birthday, Mr Putin!', *Wikipedia* entry, last modified 24.12.2013, Last accessed 02.09.2014. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Birthday,_Mr._Putin!
- 'One Like Putin', *YouTube clip*, uploaded 06.12.2008, Last accessed 02.09.2014
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK_VszbZa_s
- Khrushcheva, N. 'Putin the Perónist', *Project Syndicate*, 11.12.2013, Last accessed 02.09.2014.
<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/nina-l--khrushcheva-examines-the-affinities-between-russia-s-leader-and-argentina-s-post-war-strongman#Y6FZtM27CSX5oPU5.99>
- Pomerantsev, P. 'Putin's Rasputin', *London Review of Books*, 20.10. 2011, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n20/peter-pomerantsev/putins-rasputin>
- Bukharaev, R. '...Like the mirror of Russian democracy', *BBC Russian*, 17.03.2000, Last accessed 30.08.2014. http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/elections2000/e0317_1.stm
- Moiseev, V. 'Lev Rubinshtein; stavility is not an ideology', *Russian Reporter*, 29.05.2012, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://www.rusrep.ru/article/2012/05/28/rubinshtein/>
- Applebaum, A. 'Putinism: The Ideology', Speech given at LSE IDEAS I February 2013. Last accessed 13.11.2014. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/reports/pdf/su13-2-putinism.pdf>
- 'Finish in the crapper' (Мочить в сортире), *Wikipedia* entry, last updated 01.07.2014, Last accessed 02.09.2014.

http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9C%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%8C_%D0%B2_%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B5

Žižek, S. 'Berlusconi in Tehran', *London Review of Books*, 23.07.2009, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n14/slavoj-zizek/berlusconi-in-tehran>

Baunov, A. 'A different Putin and his new regime', *slon.ru*, 24.09.2013, Last accessed 30.08.2014. http://slon.ru/world/novyy_rezhim-994537.xhtml

Anderson, P. 'Russia's Managed Democracy', *London Review of Books*, 25.01.2007, Last accessed 30.08.2014. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n02/perry-anderson/russias-managed-democracy>

Vernov, M. 'Divine Question', *Vestnik Civitas*, 13.09.2011, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://vestnikcivitas.ru/docs/1628>

Akunin, B. 'Putin is not a nonentity, if in 20 years we have not managed to defeat him', *Polit Online*, 22.08.2012, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://www.politonline.ru/rssArticle/15348101.html>

Bidder, B. 'Putin-sect in Russia: Holy Vladimir, pray for us' (Putin-Sekte in Russland: Heiliger Wladimir, bitte für uns), *Der Spiegel* online, 29.09.2011, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/putin-sekte-in-russland-heiliger-wladimir-bitte-fuer-uns-a-788824.html>

Zakhariv, M. 'Putin the Superman', *polit.ru*, 26.10.2012, Last accessed 02.09.2014. http://polit.ru/article/2012/10/26/sverh_putin/

'Psychological profile of the President created on the basis of Putin's drawing of "Cat. Seen from Behind."', *newsru.com*, 03.09.2013, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://newsru.com/russia/03sep2013/putincat.html>

'Psychologist about Putin's drawing: The cat's tail is a phallic symbol, this is how loners striving for originality draw', *website of TV channel Rain*, 02.09.2013, Last accessed 02.09.2014. http://tvrain.ru/articles/vrach_psiholog_o_risunke_putina_hvost_koshki_fallicheskij_si_mvol_tak_risujut_odinokie_ljudi_pretendujuschie_na_originalnost-351287/

Personal blog of 'virtual dissident' Lev Sharansky, Last accessed 02.09.2014. <http://lev-sharansky2.livejournal.com/>

Conclusions

Andriopol'skaya, A. 'There are terrifying times ahead for Donetsk', *gazeta.ru*, 26.07.2014, Last accessed 14.11.2014. http://m.gazeta.ru/politics/2014/07/25_a_6146089.shtml

Bykov, D. 'War of the Writers', *Novaya Gazeta*, 08.07.2014, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/64337.html>

Bukharaev, R. '...Like the mirror of Russian democracy', *BBC Russian*, 17.03.2000, Last accessed 30.08.2014. http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/elections2000/e0317_1.stm

Gudkov, L. 'The technology of negative mobilization', *Eurozine*, 01.10.2014, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-10-01-gudkov-en.html>

'The Patriarchate is openly starting a crusade against the secular state', *kommersant.ru*, 14.09.2012, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2021499>

Stanovaya, T. 'Why is the '5th column' more dangerous than the West?', *slon.ru*, 02.12.2014. Last accessed 05.12.2014. <http://slon.ru/insights/1190639/>

Napreenko, G. 'Back in the USSR?'. *E-flux*, Issue 55, 05/2014, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/back-in-the-ussr/>

Gudkov, L. 'When Russians have nothing to be proud of, they create their own enemies', *snob.ru*, 11.08.2014, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://www.snob.ru/profile/10069/blog/79594>

Litoy, A. 'For Generation P, Putin is Russia', *open Democracy Russia*, 23.10.2014, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/alexandr-litoy/for-generation-p-putin-is-russia-cult-of-personality-youth-russia>

Adewunmi, B. 'The inconsistency of Femen's imperialist "one size fits all" attitude', *New Statesman*, 03.04.2013, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://www.newstatesman.com/bim-adewunmi/2013/04/inconsistency-femens-imperialist-one-size-fits-all-attitude>

'Biographical secrets of Pussy Riot members', *sobesednik.ru*, 31.08.2012, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://sobesednik.ru/incident/20120831-tainy-biografii-uchastnits-pussy-riot>

Gradskaia, Y., Sandomirskaja, I., Petrusenko, N. 'Pussy Riot: Reflections on Receptions', *Baltic Worlds*, 20.02.2013, Last accessed 14.11.2014. <http://balticworlds.com/reflections-on-receptions/>

Appendix A

Email forwarded to University of London departments in November 2010

Subject: PhD research (looking for Russians as interview participants)

Dear MSc and MPhil/PhD students,

My name is Maria Brock, I am a PhD student at the Institute of Social Psychology at the LSE, and I am currently conducting research on national identity and views on the political landscape in Russia. It would help me greatly if for this purpose I could speak to Russians studying here in London. The idea is to meet up for one-to-one interviews lasting around 20-30 mins. Tea or coffee is on me!

If you are Russian yourself, or know of anyone you could forward this to, I would be very grateful.

Any questions, just ask.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Maria

m.brock@lse.ac.uk

Appendix B

Loose topic guide interviews:

- How would you describe to someone who's never been to Russia, what it's like to live in it?
- How would you compare the UK and Russia? Main differences?
- If I asked you to describe the state of Russia/its political landscape in 2010, what would you say?
- What is the desirable state for a society? Does it correspond to Russia?
- What are the reasons for it not corresponding?
- What would need to change in order for it to correspond?
- Would your parents agree? Or what would they change?
- Where/how do you see Russia in 25 years' time (another generation)?

- How would you describe the Soviet Union and living in it?
- What were your dreams or ambitions when you finished school?
- What about your parents?
- What is different between now and the time before 1992? What has actually changed?
- Do you think that there is some nostalgia associated with the SU? Why/not?

- What does being Russian mean for you? Does it have a meaning?
- Any specific thoughts or feelings associated with the notion, say when you introduce yourself as Russian?
- Are these things you find yourself thinking about or discussing with others?

Appendix C

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW 5 – MASHA E.

Maria: Ok, and my first question is...actually quite simple, hopefully. Imagine you meet someone who's never been to Russia, and doesn't know much about Russia...

Masha: Uh-huh.

Maria:.. and they just ask you: 'Well, Masha, tell me, what is it like to live in Russia?'

Masha: Er....I'll probably say it's quite tough. Em....but it's fun at the same time. And I think I struggle with finding life abroad quite boring in comparison to Russia.

Er...(long pause) I think it's hard to really understand this country without living there for a while. I know many people who had a very romantic idea of it and got disillusioned very quickly. Er....it's a very big country, so you know, when you ask me about Russia, it's going to be very limited, because I know only St Petersburg, and a bit of the South of Russia, part, but there is so much more to it, and I myself didn't travel nearly enough to actually say, because Moscow is just...Often, what you read or learn about Russia is from a kind of Moscow perspective, and that is such a small part of Russia, even though probably the most important one. But, er, yeah, so Russia is really kind of....it's not very homogenous, it's very, very kind of different. If you go outside the big city, life there is going to be completely different. (Long Pause) Yeah, there are many contrasts in the country as well, so it's quite confusing as well for people who come there. Sometimes it's really often just to see one side, just to see the very rich, kind of nouveau riche-kind of behaviour of people. Or to see, just very poor, kind of grumpy, moods. But there is always a middle, which....you know, not often people see. So yeah, there is a lot of contrasts, a lot of extremes as well. But it's very different from, very different from the West, Europe, it's very different from America. And when I travel, it's very hard for me to compare it with anywhere. But I find that maybe Italians, or Italians' kind of style of life, way of life, the most maybe similar. I personally find it very easy to get on with Italians, because maybe they are more open, in the same way as Russians are, which is quite strange, but that's how it works. And in general, maybe South of Europe, is a bit maybe more similar.

Maria: And why do you think that is?

Masha: Em...I don't know why it happened historically, but, em, (long pause) I don't know, I just think, it's just pure coincidence, that some of the features of their culture kind of correspond to ours, such as...I don't know...recklessness, behaviour, or, bad control of the...uncontrolled kind of speech, and em, don't know, abundance in everything, extremes, and, ups and downs, constant ups and downs. Yeah. It might be just a coincidence, but I am sure there is some kind of theory about that. (both laugh).

Maria: You were saying that, in the beginning, that life in Russia is tough yet more interesting. Can you expand on that a little bit?

Masha: Yeah, I just think it's again, it's, it's because of these ups and downs. It's....unless, like, em...you know, like, families, that have a lot of problems inside them, like, external problems, they are often very close to each other And I think Russia is very similar in this way. You can see how all this kind of stuff, like, financial kind of problems made the country kind of, make people very close to each other. Like, very painfully close, sometimes. And I don't know, it makes it kiNd of more interesting to live. People don't just kind of keep polite face, but really say what they think. And sometimes it can be like, really painful, really hurtful, but at the same time, I don't know, it feels a bit more fun, you know, when people really say what they think about you, and about life, and about politics, and about religion, and about everything. Em....so yeah, I guess the behaviour of the nation is kind of, much more open. And they kind of behave the way they feel right now, at the moment.

Maria: So kind of spontaneous....

Masha: Yeah, yeah. There is really, really bad self-control. Living abroad made me realise how badly they control themselves, and it takes me....of course, personal qualities play a part in that, but yeah, I am really amazed how badly people in Russia can control themselves. Em....em...so yeah, there is this part of, kind of, people just being more open, and, obviously, people's vices are more open, which is very fun to watch sometimes. Em...but people's...at the same time, people's virtues are more open as well, somehow. People are very generous, and do it very openly, and give you hugs and kisses, and they say, you know, they say what you feel to you right now, at this moment. Even though you know it's something very momentary, but Russians like making these big speeches. Like really tell you you are their best friend right now. And everyone knows its not going to last, it's just the moment and everything, but it's, yeah, it's kind of fun.

Maria: So do you think your view, or, you kind of indicated your view of Russians and Russia changed, having lived abroad...does it give you a different perspective?

Masha: Oh, definitely. I think when I lived in Russia I had this kind of , I don't know, illusion of ...On the one hand, I thought that, I had this kind of imperialistic sort of , kind of illusions. I don't know, it's amazing, you just are born with it, or whatever. And, em, I really felt that in certain ways we are superior. I don't know, you just grow up learning that the education is better in Russia, and er, the girls are prettier, and all this sort of stuff, you know. And then you go abroad and you think 'um, yeah, it's not like that at all'. And when I did my Master's in Belgium I realised what was the real kind of studying hard, what it is. That was for me a big shock. And, em, but at the same time I also thought that life in the West, obviously, you know, it was very appealing, and you know, the grass is always greener and things, so I had a lot of disappointments, as well, living in the West, and er....(long pause). Yeah, so it's kind of worked both ways. On the one hand, I don't think anymore that Russians are

more superior. I actually think that they lack a lot of qualities to become successful, and to get out of this, economical pitfall they are in now. I think they have a lot, a lot to learn, it's a long way out of there. And, on the other hand, though I sort of learned that, I learned that there are qualities that the West maybe doesn't quite have, qualities that I really miss, and yeah, sort of things.

Maria: You say Russians have a lot to learn..

Masha: Yeah.

Maria: What do you mean by that?

Masha: Learn to work hard. Somehow Russians, kind of, considered to be hard-working, but I wouldn't say so, to be honest. I realise that working hard and studying hard, that's not something that is that common in Russia. Particular, maybe, particular kind of groups of population perhaps, but maybe for working-class, sort of groups, I don't think it's as kind of, they know much about that. Yeah, things like, professionalism, things like, er (long pause)....maybe, I'm not sure about the word, but, sort of being...politeness and correctness, and er, respect to other people and to other people's opinion. Like, when you listen to debates on the radio in Russia it's just...it's a nightmare, it makes me... I just can't believe it, it's ridiculous. I go to Russia, and my mum, she normally listens to *Ekho Moskv*, a supposedly, sort of intellectual radio, but it's just ridiculous, they just shout and scream at each other, and er...like mad. So people don't really listen to each other very much, and don't respect each other very much. And unfortunately, they judge very much by how much people earn, quite a bit. It's very materialistic. I hope that's something that is just passing, you know, like in many developing countries I think they become very materialistic. And this phase Russia is in very much. It's funny meeting my friends, for example, em....and for me it's kind of, I can see how much they changed since, sort of, 90s. They are very much concerned about buying a flat and buying...you know, taking out loans, and cars, and things like that. Which people are here as well, but the scale is just, you know...People are so much more...that's all they talk pretty much about. Em, yeah. I mean, I struggled with my own family, just to explain to them, that, you know, money is not everything, and giving up my job was, like a big decision, because I don't think they quite realised what it was all about. They think that char...like, for example, doing some charity or not working is just, like, for fools, or for people who have money already, and things like that. And that's like, a lot of people in Russia think. Because I think I have a good understanding of what working-class people in Russia think, because it's where my family are. Because I'm sure, I'm only talking from the perspective of kind of, limited circle of people. I'm sure there are people who are very different. I do meet a lot of people who amaze me how different they are. But they always have some kind of...I don't know. They either study abroad, or, don't know, their parents are some kind of, I don't know, diplomat or something. They would have some kind of little privilege that would make them this one step more advanced from the rest of the country. But there is a lot of potential. It's just...it's kind of a shame that at the moment it's all sort of focused on money so much.

Maria: You were saying earlier that maybe this is indicative of a kind of developing world. So do you see Russia as a developing country?

Masha: Definitely, yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's again, it's maybe not that straightforward, as with some other countries, because in Russia there are so many kind of... On the surface, you might see it's all very glossy, like Moscow, for example, but on the whole it's definitely a developing country. I mean, that's what I'm sure....

Maria: Er.. I don't know how interes... well, I'm sure you are interested in politics in Russia. If someone asked you to explain to them what the political landscape looks like at the moment... could you... how you would describe it?

Masha: Well, I would say that nominally Russia is a democracy and er... but, I would also say that we used to be a communist country, and there is still a bit of that. There is sort... the communist burden is always there, and it has a lot of effects on how the country is being kind of managed. Firstly, because people, the nation, is very much used to being told what to do. And they don't feel they are free to say. And they are afraid, they are very much afraid to protest, and to kind of stand for their rights. Em... and I don't think they really appreciate democracy very much. And understand what it's all about, and don't understand the long-term benefits. They are very short-term focused. Em... which is probably the effect of, I don't know, (muffled word). Yeah, but, so in Russia you probably won't be in prison for saying what you think, but there are definitely a lot of limitations for people's ... on people's lives and freedoms. Freedom of speech, I think, like media is very much governed, kind of, controlled. There aren't many, I mean, I don't know, there aren't many free sources of information. *Novaya Gazeta* and *Ekho Moskvy*, but, I mean, that's ridiculous for a country, such a big country. Yeah, again, I don't know how much people care about that. Not at the moment, though. And people's passiveness, political passiveness is completely being taken advantage of.

Maria: Where do you think that comes from, that passivity? You said you take it back to communism...

Masha: Hmm. Yeah, on the one hand it's because of the kind of communist past. But on the other hand the time of *perestroika*. The times of real hardships for people and economical instability I think had a very bad effect. It's sort of a trauma in way. People are so afraid to lose everything once again... and they are so appreciative I think, like, you know, any poor person would be appreciative of a little something someone gives him. Yeah, they just so kind of appreciate and cherish this little economic stability that they've had for, I don't know, a few years now. And then people do live better. I mean, I know what it's been in the 90s, it was a real nightmare. People don't struggle anymore, you know, anyone can buy food, as much food as they want, and I think... it will probably take a while till people have enough of this food, enjoy it and then sort of look around and say 'right, so maybe now we want to read true, you know, truth in the newspapers.' But it will take while, so...

Maria: Do you think there is kind of a consensus in Russia, or do you see one from abroad, about what people, what the society wants or needs right now?

Masha: You mean the Russian society?

Maria: Yeah.

Masha: What people in the West think the Russian society needs?

Maria: What you, looking at it from the West, or whenever you are in Russia, do you feel that there is a kind of common, commonality in what people want, what society wants?

Masha: Er, well, they definitely, they definitely want...(laughs) more money (both laugh). I think people just want stability and financial stability. They need to regain kind of trust that things are not gonna change overnight. Yeah....so maybe once they have their kind of economical, don't know (long pause)...success, and things like that, maybe after a while, if it's not too late, they can, sort of, be developed and think about what they want in terms of government and politics, and who they want to kind of be in charge, and er...

Maria: You said: 'If it's not too late'?

Masha: Well, I just think the country is becoming terribly corrupt, and I am just not sure how long it can last and what's going to take the country to..Yeah, I don't know what's going to be in 10 years, if it's going to go on like that, if there won't be a new generation of people in power...decent people, who don't take bribes and, er, who actually believe what they say. I mean, I know it's the case for many, many countries, but the scale of it in Russia is just ridiculous.

Maria: Ok, you said...I am just going to take you by your word, you said you don't know what it's going to be like in 10 years...

Masha: Hmm.

Maria: ...but let us speculate: what do you think will happen, what will the country be like in another generation's time, so 25, 30 years? What's your, kind of gut feeling?

Masha: I don't know, it's really hard to say. Em, I mean, seeing from what young, what kind of young people, the politics...I wouldn't be very optimistic.

Maria: Ok....

Masha: I think they will follow very much the way of their parents. Because there is a lot of nepotism in Russia, so if there is not, like, a big kind of revolution, people don't stand up, then probably the children of the people who are in power now, they will

be in power in 10 years, 10 years later. It's very likely. And looking at them now, yes, they are more educated than their parents, they went to, a lot of them went to English universities and English schools, em, so probably it will be a bit better. But I also know how well people can adapt what they've learned in England to their kind of Russian...Russian customs. I don't think they will be brave enough to change things very quickly. But hopefully, hopefully, if there will be enough educated, well-educated people in power, they will be more concerned about what the West thinks about them. And they would like to be more like the West, and hopefully they will be kind of constrained by the West more than the leaders today are. So, yeah, probably that's more realistic.

Maria: So you see the West as a positive influence on Russia?

Masha: I think so, yeah, definitely. I think the West's been a constraint, even during Soviet, communist times. The only reasons why...I mean, I know that a lot of atrocities in the Soviet Union didn't happen, didn't take place only because the Soviet Union was so dependent on the West as its biggest buyer and er....yeah, and there are many other incidences, even in Russia since. Yeah, I definitely think...I mean, people say that America is a big policeman and etcetera, but I don't know. I personally, especially when I lived in Russia, em, thought that it's nice to have like a balance of power, someone to balance off Russia, and it's not China (laughs). I don't know. I know, no one is perfect and I know there is a lot of corruption in America as well and in the West, in Western Europe, but, I don't know, I just think that they are more developed, more advanced, more professional.

Maria: You were born...I'm just wondering, in '84?

Masha: Yeah.

Maria: So you didn't get to experience that much of the Soviet Union...

Masha: Well, a little bit, a little bit. I was an *oktyabrenok*.

Maria: Ah, you made it, like me, yeah.

Masha: Just one year, and er, yeah, so a little bit.

Maria: Would you mind telling me, what your image of the Soviet Union is now?

Masha: My personal image...it was a very happy, kind of, personal time of my life. My parents got divorced after *perestroika*, so before that, you know, it was a great time for me. We lived in the South of Russia and my, both parents worked in the university. I had a lovely, you know, university professors, they had a, my father got a very decent salary, and we had a very decent style of life. A big flat, a big dacha, and it was fine. After the collapse, it coincided with the divorce of my parents, things changed. So that..I hate the 90s, I hate *perestroika*, that for me was just such a mess and suddenly this flood of everything, from everywhere, em, yeah, so...but now...But

it's funny now, somehow I grew up without learning much about gulags, and about, you know what was happening before, in the 60s and the 30s in Russia, and then, now, I am learning about it and I realise, actually, what it was all about. So probably, yes, you are right, I didn't really live in the Soviet union.

Maria: No, no, I didn't mean it like that.

Masha: Because I think that part of it, kind of the biggest part of it, that's something that I really had no idea about and I only learned about it being here. So...yeah...you know, people are quite, even my generation, I think, they are quite nostalgic about Soviet times. Like, a lot of their parents divorced as the Soviet Union collapsed, because this is when husbands suddenly, you know, husbands who were engineers and people, they were suddenly off work and had often, had to do, like, dirty jobs to survive, to keep the family. A lot of men were quite passive, a lot of divorces happened like that. My brother tells me (laughs) the story that happened with his friend. He lost his job and his wife was so desperate for him to go to work, and she kept sort of nagging him every day 'you have to go and get a job'. And one day she said 'Why don't you go and rob someone?' And he did, and went to prison right away. I think he was really depressed and very desperate and just went to the shop and just did something very stupid and got into prison right there and right now. It's a school friend of my brother's. Yeah, it's just stupid (laughs). But yeah, you know, the thing that we were all kind of equal, and then suddenly at school after, after the *perestroika*, suddenly there were children who were rich, and who were not rich. Suddenly, these differences, social differences, came up. Something that we never knew, were not prepared as well. Like, in England, people, at least growing up, they know what class they belong to and they are kind of proud being a part of this class, but in Russia it was a really big shock for some people to realise that they are not equal and...really.

Maria: So you say that the associations for you, with the Soviet Union, are mainly positive. Do you think it's because of what came after, because of the 90s being what they were? Such a big change, you said so much, suddenly....

Masha: Hmm...well, but if you look at it from the perspective of what was happening in the late 80s. I mean, obviously, as a child, I couldn't care less about, you know, freedoms and stuff like that. But economically, I know it was all, it wasn't all real, but economically the country was doing...you know, people had their salaries, my family had their salaries and they could buy whatever they wanted. I mean, there wasn't much in the shops, but you know...So, I don't know even looking just from this kind of perspective, it couldn't go on for a long time, but 80s was, 80s was like, yeah.....but I agree, it's probably the shock of the 90s as well. Especially in comparison to the relatively calm 80s.

Maria: Would you mind talking about the 90s, as in, what you remember, what was it like?

Masha: Ah...suddenly there was this...i don't know...there was a lot of Mafia things, and I don't know, it just ticked in my mind, a lot of these kinds of guys in leather jackets hanging around, a lot of these stupid films, like, really rubbish film (interviewer laughs), horrible, horrible films. Em, yeah, just a lot of...and I mean, money then became...even not money, but getting stuff. Stuff became really important. Clothes and, em, suddenly. And just changes, a lot of changes. Changes in prices, and like, all the time, and I remember '98, and it was horrible, I mean, overnight everything just changed, unbelievable. I don't know, it was really stressful being at school. Looking back at it now, and just remembering how stressed our teachers were, I mean, it's ridiculous. A lot of, kind of, screaming. Teachers, especially women, they were quite aggressive. Looking back at it now you might think that they had obviously been affected as well. (long pause) Yeah, just not really knowing what's going on, what's happening, that was a bit scary. (long pause). Hm. Just kind of, just going to the markets, because there weren't many shops, and I just remember it being very, just messy and...getting something or doing something bureaucratic was always, yeah, I just remember these queues and all these offices. I mean, things didn't change very much, but it was really, really worse then. (long pause) But probably what gets me more is how poor culturally the country was in the 90s.

Maria: Culturally...

Masha: yeah.

Maria: Do you think it's different now?

Masha: Well, I don't know. I didn't, II just think it was worse then. And, er, I'm really lucky that I had a few kind of old-school teachers, a few amazing people that taught me. Just lucky, really. But otherwise, yeah, just ...i don't think there was much going on for children in terms of, like, culture, or...and Russian classics, I think , also, I mean, that's what I think was my source of education, sort of self-education. Because, after school I don't know, what did we do after school? I mean, everything was in such a mess, it was... I remember when I was a bit older I started doing things after school, I did a course at the Hermitage as a child. It was quite good. But it was kind of very...very basic. Just some people who were very enthusiastic about it....but I remember we would be sitting in very cold rooms, things like that. But, I was just lucky. And because of my mother, she really believed in these kinds of things, she really tried...for me to learn English. Because, obviously, if I wouldn't take courses outside my school I would never learn English. So she kind of really tried hard for me to do it....yeah, I don't think school gave me a lot of...to be honest, a lot of anything. Neither did my university in Russia. I don't know, it's hard to say. Hm...

Maria: So, being Russian, what do you think you have taken with you now, to England from...sort of, you know what I mean, mentally? What does it mean for you to be Russian, in the UK?

Masha: I don't know. It might sound a bit sort of...I don't know...like it has a lot of pathos. Or whatever it is Russians are famous for. My husband is like, he finds it ridiculous, he always makes faces when I say things like that...

Maria: It's free space for pathos here..

Masha: Exactly, exactly. Taking my chance (both laugh). Em, I really think that Russian kind of inheritance in terms of literature and culture, everything that was written and done before...I don't know...before 1917, before the Revolution, basically, I think that still has a lot of effect on people. And hopefully this is what one day what, I don't know, people will kind of go back to. They'll realise that that's what's really really precious. And that's what Russia is about. About charity, about patriotism, about people giving up their lives for their country. Em....about people being reckless, but in a kind of amazing, heroic way.Yeah, these kinds of things.That I can only...well, not only, but you read about it in Russian literature. They are very dear to me. I am really proud of that, really proud of this. Especially as I studied Russian literature, it made me so happy to be Russian. It's not that I chose to study Russian literature because I'm Russian, because it's that I really loved....em...but actually being Russian, that always made me think: I am so proud to be a part of it. And that's amazing. That's what I only felt when I did Russian literature being abroad here, which is ridiculous, but, never mind...But also, I mean, I see as I said that there is a lot of potential in Russia, and I meet a lot of amazing people when I go there. A lot of my friends are very talented musicians, operators, you know, film operators, and, yeah, some of them are just amazing, and they are amazingly graceful people, amazingly generous, amazingly open. At the same time, so there is this kind of..definitely, there are these people who are kind of, for me, associated with Russian classical literature, who kind of embody that for me.

Maria: So do you believe in something like a, you know, Russian soul, Russian spirit?

Masha: Em...yeah, definitely, there is something like that. I mean, it's probably exaggerated a bit. I...I think there is something like a British spirit, and a British soul, em, which is equally as amazing, it's just not as maybe showy as the Russian one. I know that my husband, I can...he's an amazingly reliable person, an amazingly committed person, very hard-working and trustworthy and...yeah, all these qualities that look maybe quite boring from the outside but, you know, in the end (laughs)....so yeah, there is something as a Russian soul, but it's just like any other nationality's soul. It's just I think that Russian writers can write about it better. Maybe again, because of those qualities that Russians have, it becomes more apparent...

Maria: Well, I think that's it from my side. The kind of questions I asked you, is that something you find yourself talking about?

Masha: Em, no, not at all. I think about it, I think about these things. I do sometimes have to talk about politics though. Very often, actually, people get me to talk about

Putin...*Pyutin*, shall I say? (laughs) That's how they call him, and, you know, about Russian oligarchs and things like that, poisonings, and things like that (laughs)

Maria: The scandalous aspects...

Masha: Yeah, exactly. Em, or you know, like, just about St Petersburg and how hard it is to get a visa and things like that. But yeah, practical things, practical things of politics and everything. But I often think about what it is to be Russian. I often think about how differently things would have been, what it would be to be Russian, if there wouldn't be 1917, there wouldn't be revolution, there wouldn't be communism...things would just go on after 1917 as they were. I think that's quite interesting. What it would be like...what it would be like then. Would we be more Russian? Or is the Communist Party part of being truly Russian, or is just a group of some kind of mad guys? Yeah, these kinds of things I think about. I don't know what I should be associating myself with. Should I be associating myself with communism as well, or should I just, you know, associate myself, kind of choose and pick what to be Russian, or is it a whole kind of box? Do I have to take it...

Maria: Take it as it is...or as it was.

Masha: Yeah, as it was. Because I don't feel like. I mean, I know a lot of Russians sort of consider communism as a part of their history...yeah...and sometimes they even, well, they say they are even kind of proud of it. But I personally, I don't want it to be a part of my history. I mean, it's the same for me as Nazi, it's the same as Hitler is for Germany. Yeah, I should ask some Germans, some young Germans..I should ask you (both laugh) what you think about that. Whether you can..is it something where you would sort of think 'yeah, that's part of my history', or is it something you just want to erase, and just not consider....I mean, is it worth really being part of your history?

[End of recording]

Appendix D

Sociodemographics – interview participants						
No.	Gender	Name	Age	Place of Birth	Current location	Profession
1	m	Yura	30	Moscow	London	PhD student
2	f	Katia	22	Moscow	London	MSc student
3	f	Natasha	27	Moscow	London	MSc student
4	m	Andrey	34	St Petersburg	London	Msc student
5	f	Masha	26	St Petersburg	London	MA student
6	f	Irina	22	Yoshkar-Ola	London	MA student
7	f	Anelya	22	Moscow	London	MBA
8	f	Natasha	26	Krasnodar	London	MA student

Appendix E

Text of email from 27.03.2012 inviting participation in online survey:

Приветствую!

Как Вы, наверное, уже знаете, одним из аспектов моей кандидатской диссертации в Биркбекском Университете Лондона, является анализ того, что русские говорят и как они относятся к тому, что это значит -- быть русским. После первой стадии, состоявшей непосредственно из интервью, я надеюсь теперь собрать онлайн-нарративы, т.е. короткие повествования, с последующими онлайн-интервью.

Для этого я подготовила небольшой опрос (на русском) и буду чрезвычайно благодарна, если Вы ответите на мои вопросы, посвятив им несколько минут своего времени.

Не могли бы Вы, кроме того, переслать эту ссылку по электронной почте друзьям, родителям, знакомым, всем, кому бы это с Вашей точки зрения могло бы быть интересно. Единственным квалификационным критерием является то, что участник должен быть уроженцем России (Советского Союза).

Очень надеюсь, что по завершению у Вас не возникнет ощущения потерянного времени.

Большое Спасибо,

Мария

PS: если появятся дополнительные вопросы, не стесняйтесь задавайте их, пишите.

М.

English Translation:

Hello,

As you may know, in my PhD project at the Dept. of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck College (University of London) I am looking at ways Russians talk about, and relate to, Russianness. After a first stage comprising face-to-face interviews, I am now hoping to collect online narratives, to be followed by email interviews.

For this purpose, I have designed a short survey (in Russian) and would greatly appreciate if you could take the time to fill it in:

Additionally, it would be great if you could forward this link via email to as many friends, family members and acquaintances as possible, the only condition being that individuals were born in Russia.

I hope you will enjoy participating in my study!

Thank you very much,

Maria

PS: If you have any questions, do let me know. M.

Appendix F

Survey questions

- What does it take to become Russian?
Please answer in as much detail as possible.
- Try to think of a moment or incident that made you feel especially Russian.
Please describe it in as much detail as possible.
- Can you list a number of items (objects, sensations) that are truly Russian?
Could you please explain why you have chosen them?
- Has the meaning of Russianness/of being Russian changed over time? If so, how and why?
- Please describe or provide the link to an image or picture which would convey a sense of Russia or Russianness. Please explain why you have chosen this image.

Appendix G

Pictures utilised in online survey (in order of their appearance)

Picture A: Isaac Levitan's Birch Grove



Picture B: Russian dolls



Picture C: Young Pioneers in central Moscow



Picture D: Commuters



Picture E: Vladimir Putin



Appendix H

Sociodemographics – survey participants					
No.	Gender	Age	Place of Birth	Current location	Profession
1	m	39	Leningrad	London	Mathematician
2	f	38	Kurgan	Moscow	translator
3	f	35	Samara	Samara	engineer
4	m	33	Yaroslavl	London	Bank clerk
5	f	24	Olenogorsk	Moscow	journalist
6	f	30	Yakutsk	Moscow	journalist
7	f	28	China	Moscow	Medical equipment specialist
8	m	33	Moscow	Moscow	manager
9	f	34	Moscow	Moscow	economist
10	f	28	Chelyabinsk	Chelyabinsk	Internet analyst
11	m	32	Moscow	Moscow	sociologist
12	f	61	Saratov	Moscow	proofreader
13	f	26	Tomsk	Moscow	journalist
14	f	29	Moscow	Moscow	lawyer
15	f	40	Arkhangelsk	Moscow	Designer (florist)
16	m	40	Chita	Moscow	Event organiser
17	f	30	Moscow	Moscow	Entrepreneur
18	f	31	Tomsk	Tomsk	Lawyer
19	f	28	Ukraine	Moscow	musician
20	f	29	Moscow	Germany	Market analyst
*21	m	48	Leningrad	St Petersburg	doctor
22	m	75	Moscow	Moscow	architect
23	f	35	Germany	Italy	Employee (private sector)
24	f	39	Moscow	Italy	journalist
25	m	38	Moscow	Toronto	IT Marketing
26	f	50	Moscow	Moscow	“expert”
27	m	41	Moscow	London	Translator/historian
28	f	45	Aleksin	Moscow	accountant
29	f	35	Moscow region	Moscow	Producer/journalist
30	f	39	Russia	Kaliningrad	Primary school teacher
31	m	44	Kaliningrad	Kaliningrad	manager
32	f	28	Ekaterinburg	Pennsylvania, US	Assistant professor of energy economics
33	m	44	Kaliningrad	London	University lecturer
34	m	50	Vilnius	Kaliningrad	University professor

Appendix I

Consent form

Research study at the London School of Economics & Political Science, Institute of Social Psychology

You are asked to participate in an interview about national identity and views on the political landscape in Russia. This interview will contribute to research towards a PhD in Social Psychology at the LSE, Institute of Social Psychology. My supervisor at the Institute is Dr Derek Hook (D.W.Hook@lse.ac.uk).

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. With your consent I will record it on tape.

The interview will consist of questions regarding your personal experiences and views of Russia.

Participation in this interviews is voluntary. The interview can be interrupted at any time or you can ask me not to use or delete parts of the interview afterwards.

Your name will not appear or be used anywhere. I will use pseudonyms only.

Thank you for your participation!

Maria Brock

I agree to the conditions above and agree to participate in this study.

Date and signature:

Appendix J

Disclaimer for survey participants

Добро пожаловать!

ЦЕЛЬ ПРОЕКТА: Вы приглашаетесь принять участие в онлайн-опросе, который является частью масштабного проекта по изучению аспектов современной национальной идентификации. Проект осуществляется Биркбекским Университетом Лондона под руководством Доктора Дерек Хука (Derek Hook) и Профессора Линн Сегал (Lynne Segal). Участникам опроса предлагается ответить на ряд коротких вопросов.

ТЕХНИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ: Если Вы согласны принять участие в Проекте, пожалуйста выберите "continue" в конце страницы и следуйте дальнейшим указаниям.

ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКОВ: Участвовать или не участвовать в Проекте -- дело Вашего свободного выбора. Если Вы сначала решите участвовать в Проекте, а затем передумаете, Вы можете прекратить Ваше участие в любой момент.

Собранная информация сугубо конфиденциальна и будет использоваться исключительно в научных целях в рамках Проекта.

Данный исследовательский проект соответствует этическим нормам и принципам Британского Психологического Общества.

Если у Вас возникнут дополнительные вопросы, пожалуйста пишите исследователю по электронной почте, по адресу mbrock01@mail.bbk.ac.uk

English translation:

Welcome

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a survey, which forms part of a larger project on contemporary national identity. The project is being undertaken at Birkbeck College, University of London and is being supervised by Dr Derek Hook and Prof Lynne Segal. Participants will be asked to read and answer a few short questions.

PROCEDURES

If you choose to participate in this study, please select 'next' at the bottom of this page and you will be given further instructions

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

You should not feel obliged to agree to participate.

If you first agree to participate and then you change your mind, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the survey.

All information collected is confidential and will only be used for scientific and research purposes.

This research is governed by the ethical principles set down by the British Psychological Society.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher by email: mbrock01@mail.bbk.ac.uk